



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

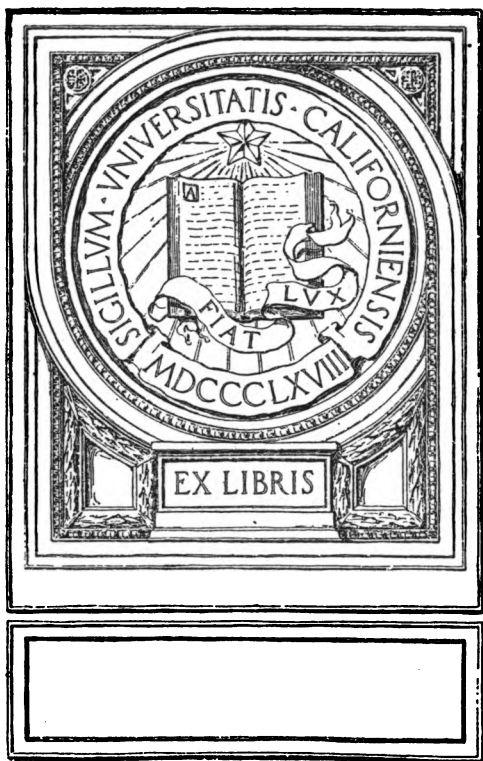
We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

5/-



On Active Service Series

THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA



ASHAR CREEK, BASRA



THE TIGRIS BELOW BAGHDAD

THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

BY ERNEST BETTS

(Late the Worcestershire Regiment)

WITH A FRONTISPIECE AND A MAP

LONDON : JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD, W.
NEW YORK : JOHN LANE COMPANY. MCMXX

THE STATESMAN
ANNOUNCEMENT

1568
5
14

*Acknowledgment is due to the Proprietors
of "The Statesman" (Calcutta) for permission
to reprint Chapter XXIII.*

The Mayflower Press, Plymouth, England. William Brendon & Son, Ltd.

G. E. P.

TO
MY MOTHER
WHO PLAYS THE PIANO

486294

PREFACE

THIS book is an attempt to set down as freely as possible an individual war experience. For the soldier, the opportunity to do so marks a transformation from silence to freedom of expression which the end of the war alone could accomplish. Until then, any individuality he possessed, and such faint signs of life as an ordinary mortal shows, were so completely obliterated that it was superfluous for him to explain to anyone that he was a human being. He was not a human being. He was merely a dun-coloured brick amid an infinity of dun-coloured bricks, and his objections to such a form would have been answered thus : " It's not a bit of use your talking. You say you are not a human being. Well—*neither are we human beings !* " And placing his diminished personality, as it

viii THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

were, in his pocket, he would have strode on to the parade-ground and cried in a terrible voice :
“ Company—advance in column of fours from the right ! ”

But those days are ended. The fighter has emerged at last from this voiceless neutrality into something which certainly doesn't matter very much, but which is at all events animate, articulate, and free to think. That is certainly better than being compulsorily thoughtless.

There are still interesting things to be said about Mesopotamia. I do not mean tactics or slaughtered Divisions ; I do not mean maps and melodrama at Headquarters, or Generals actually fighting. Rather my aim has been to depict the life of one man precariously fighting a battle with somebody else's brains, instead of that somebody else, tabbed and immaculate, safely fighting it with a million brains ; all of them stereotyped, barren, mechanical, obedient—and, more than anything, pathetic.

PREFACE

ix

It is to this individual aspect of the campaign that I have given most attention. But here and there, in happier moments, I have forgotten about fighting altogether.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
PREFACE	vii
I. THE CITY OF DISAPPOINTMENT (I)	3
II. THE CITY OF DISAPPOINTMENT (II)	12
III. ORDEAL THE FIRST	20
IV. FOOD AND MISFORTUNE	30
V. THE FORBIDDEN QUESTION	40
VI. ONE NIGHT	50
VII. SENSATION	57
VIII. UP AT ABU ROMĀN	71
IX. "OH, TO BE IN ENGLAND"	79
X. BATTLE	88
XI. COLLAPSE	104
XII. OVERHEARD AT BASRA	112
XIII. TALKING OF INDIA	121
XIV. STILL TALKING OF INDIA	132
XV. THE CITY OF FASCINATION	145
XVI. DIVERSIONS OF THE DESERT	154

xii THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

CHAPTER .	PAGE
XVII. TACTICS AND CAFÉ AU LAIT	165
XVIII. BAG AND BAGGAGE	177
XIX. A MATINÉE PERFORMANCE	186
XX. THE MEN WHO MATTER	195
XXI. SHOVELS	208
XXII. THE NEW NOTEPAPER	215
XXIII. AFTER SIX O'CLOCK	220
XXIV. THE LAST THRILL	232

THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

CHAPTER I

THE CITY OF DISAPPOINTMENT (I)

IT seems a peculiarly unfortunate thing that when the British first landed in Mesopotamia in 1914 they should have arrived in a country whose once abundant glories had disappeared some three thousand years beforehand. For the particular corner of the East we were sent to, and the peculiar set of circumstances which brought us there, cheated us at one blow of all the accumulated richness of the past and the still unaccumulated resources of the future. It would have been much better, thought we, to have fought under Alexander or Cyrus. All we saw was a dim magnificence filling in the pageantry of

4 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

the past, and a still dimmer opulence guiding the lives of posterity. It is true, nobody fights for riches or the luxuries of caliphs. That would be absurd. And even if it were not absurd (as some might assert) a soldier is rarely required to ask what he is fighting for. He is supposed to fight.

Before the war, "Iraq-i '-Arabi" or Lower Mesopotamia was in a state bordering on stagnation. A certain amount of trade was carried on, mainly British, but the Arabs themselves were without enterprise and without ambition. They existed listlessly under a semi-Turkish regime that was extortionate and arbitrary, and very little else. And curiously enough it was the life they loved and wanted.

But in the eyes of those soldier-pioneers who first set foot in it in 1914, Mesopotamia was a mere barren desert, as totally devoid of attraction as anything you could name in the universe. They viewed with dismay its gaunt and parched appearance. It was a repulsive place ; it was not worth fighting for ; its civilization was extinct ; its inhabitants barbarians ; its climate intolerable—and it was about three thousand miles from England. This last dis-

advantage, be it observed, was a serious one for the young soldier. (Nobody worries about the old soldier.) It meant—who can say how much it meant? I know well enough the soldier's answer to that question, and the sadly-humorous look in the eyes that comes with it. It was perhaps fortunate he knew so little and was content to remain ignorant. For, as every one will remember, operations had been in progress but little more than a year before sinister rumours began to circulate as to the way in which they were being conducted. Questions were asked in Parliament; the Press was silent; the whole campaign was a gigantic mystery.

Then came the hundred-mile retreat from Ctesiphon towards the end of 1915, and the Persian Gulf began to manifest all those signs which generally precede disaster. At home it was spoken of (I remember quite clearly) as a place to be avoided, much as you might the House of Commons or the club at a station in India. Indeed, you had only to go there—at Government expense—to discover that such was literally the case. He was a fool who asked to be sent to the Persian Gulf,

6 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

Once you have made the journey, however (and come back again), it is a pleasant thing to settle down in an easy-chair with a sweet-smoking briar to consider, calmly and comfortably, what manner of a country it is you have left.

While you were up at the Front conditions seldom lent themselves to contemplation, except of a possible attack, or of the stars thickly freckling the night sky. But now, at this more peaceful stage in your career, there is nothing to hinder your return (in imagination) to the land of dust.

It is unfortunate to have to start from Basra—the natural gateway to Mesopotamia—for it is not, and never will be, a place to evoke much enthusiasm. At mention of it the soldier remains cynically silent or indulges in a special vocabulary of his own. Ordinary language is quite inadequate to describe Basra as viewed by the Tommy. He will be more polite about Amara, and may even smile at the mention of Baghdad, as if in recollection of some unique experience there—perhaps the offer of a really cold drink. But, for the great majority, the Base which supplied the Expeditionary Force

in Mesopotamia was entirely without attraction. It was merely regarded as a convenient shopping centre for last-minute requirements before going up to the firing-line, and except in its commercial aspect it was a much-abused and generally-hated locality.

At the time I arrived there I had no opportunity of reviling it, though I have since had my revenge. I was one of a party of six officers who had been hurriedly flung off a troopship into the midst of a huge fringe of date-palms bordering the river. I can remember wandering into the town, with all its strangeness clinging to me like some new and not too comfortable garment. There was certainly much to marvel at, but little to please—though I am aware that no right-minded person goes on active service for entertainment.

I could describe Basra better by indicating its negative qualities sooner than by picturing it brick by brick, and street by street. It lacks nearly everything considered desirable in a prosperous city. The only things it has in plenty are dates and disease, and in the summer, flies and fever. Our draft was fortunate in arriving there in the winter, when the climate

8 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

is quite endurable. Basra itself is not seen at the first glance, though you put it on your letters home. The place you see as the ship comes to anchor is called Ashar, and properly speaking it is a suburb of the town. It lies on the right bank of the river Shatt-el-Arab, flowing broad and beautiful into the aching blue of the Persian Gulf. Look north, south, east or west, and your eye will be held by little else but palm-trees. Inland they extend about a mile, in long, neat, irrigated avenues, and this only on one side of the river. It is not until Kurna is reached, some forty-six miles farther up-stream, that your gaze is finally rid of them, and the dense belt of date-gardens thins out and disappears, leaving a dull immense stretch of sandy waste.

The town of Ashar is exceedingly animated. It abounds in noises and smells, movement and colour. If you expect a scene of Oriental grandeur, however, you will have to paint it with your own brush. Squalor, dust and disease intermingle, and are a part of the inhabitants. It is plain the soap sold in the bazaars is bought only by the British, who cheerfully pay an absurd price for it. The

Arabs, striding about impatiently and with a certain foreboding majesty, object neither to dirt nor discomfort, having been born to both. They rend the air with their discordant conversation, making emphatic gestures with every sentence. There must be something very incomplete about the Arab's vocabulary that he should have to indicate so much by action. In an argument his gestures and speech are of the wildest. It is impossible to guess what evolutions he might not go through were you to tell him of something really exciting, such as a murder round the corner or a fire in the bazaar.

Those who are not promenading the streets (there seems always a hint of swagger in the Arab gait) sit cross-legged in their shops indifferently awaiting the advent of a customer. If you are the customer, you must be ready to strike a bargain, for the native shopkeeper is a ruthless man, and lives only to add still more silver to his hoard.

"I want a looking-glass," you begin, eyeing the assortment of wares before you.

The owner of the shop uncurls himself from his squatting position and reaches for the

10 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

object in question. Then, very slowly, he hands the glass to you, and while you examine it resumes his seat—as if he has done all that can be expected of anyone anxious to sell goods.

“How much?”

“Three rupees, eight annas.”

“Absurd!” you retort, hoping he will understand the tone, if not the actual sense of the word. As a matter of fact, he pretends to have understood neither. “I’ll give you two rupees for it.”

“Three rupees, eight annas,” comes the demand again.

“Very well, you can keep it,” you reply testily, and begin to walk away.

But the glass is a good one, and you must have a glass for shaving in the morning. The process is quite dangerous enough in any case. So you come back and examine it once again. Then in terms of concession :

“I’ll let you have three rupees for it.”

“Three rupees, eight annas,” the proprietor re-echoes.

“But it’s got a crack in the back of it,” you exclaim indignantly, pointing to the defect.

“Do you expect me to pay for that?”

CITY OF DISAPPOINTMENT II

The Arab, still trying not to understand, makes a gesture of abandon.

"Three rupees," he sings out sadly.

And that is what he receives. As you turn the corner he will smile, perhaps, and jingle the money in his hand. You are the fifth officer who has given him a rupee too much.

CHAPTER II

THE CITY OF DISAPPOINTMENT (II)

OUR raw, enthusiastic party of six spent most of their time in the bazaar buying Mess stores and kit which they could not expect to obtain after leaving Basra. We appointed Bevan our Mess President, as he seemed of the correct epicurean temperament. At all events he lived in the neighbourhood of Piccadilly, and was fond of Scott's oysters. He was very accommodating, and willingly received suggestions as to the daily menu. Lime-juice and cocoa were thought indispensable, and it was touching to buy jam that had been made in Charing Cross Road. The provisions we bought were meant to supplement our Army rations, but more often the rations supplemented our provisions. We intended to accustom ourselves gradually to changed conditions. When you consider the enormous gulf between roast

duck eaten in a ship's saloon and bully beef eaten on a packing-case, you will understand how desirable it was to introduce some sort of intermediate fare—as a mere aid to digestion.

In the course of our shopping expeditions we saw much of the town. Its houses of pale biscuit-coloured brick, native made, had a peculiar appearance of being unfinished. There were no cornices or eaves to round off the tops of the walls, which were limned in abrupt, irregular lines against a background of unsullied blue. It was as if the builder had gone off to lunch in the middle of his job and forgotten to return. Some of the houses were mud-built, and it was a marvel how they could withstand the severe winter weather. With a jack-knife you could easily scratch a hole in one of these walls—if you wanted to leave your mark in Mesopotamia. The whole appearance of the town was one of semi-ruin and decay. Walls crumbled and were left to crumble, and nobody seemed to mind.

Basra at that time was not the flourishing place it is now. No neat little trains puffed

14 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

ostentatiously round corners, suffocating the palm-trees (and, it is to be hoped, the mosquitoes) with their smoke. No reliable bridges spanned the creeks. No architect came to plan new houses or pull down the tottering remains of old ones. In those days the inhabitants were but newly accustomed to British occupation, and every innovation we made brought astonishment to their eyes.

The town of Ashar is crossed by several creeks winding to mysterious depths inland. Of these the most interesting is Ashar Creek itself. You can explore it in a "bellum"—a sort of flat-bottomed canoe, eighteen to twenty feet long, with upturned prows and an awning at one end to give protection from the sun. Two Arabs propel the boat—one squatting in front with an oar, the other standing in rear with a pole. On first arriving in the country, desirous perhaps of "cutting a dash," you pay them a royal six annas to paddle you from one side of the river to the other, only to discover afterwards that one anna is as much as they should receive. Vanity is an expensive failing in Mesopotamia.

The first thing observed on approaching

Ashar is a large native café, very dark and unhealthy-looking inside, and packed at all hours of the day with a host of jabbering Arabs. It is situated on a stretch of elevated ground on the waterside, and is doubtless the Simpson's of Basra. Old men and young, Arab and Kurd, Armenian and Jew, gather here and puff volumes of strong blue smoke into the choking atmosphere. Every Arab cannot afford a hookah, however, so Abdul, after a few puffs, hands it to brother Huzain; until the latter, seeing the expectant eye of Kassim upon him, passes it on for the enjoyment of a third.

The very old men, lounging about in languid attitudes over their coffee, talk to each other with that detached deliberation characteristic of the aged, or sit silently absorbed in their own simple philosophy. Presumably they are retired silver dealers or silk merchants boasting many shekels under the boards of their houses. Some of them are handsome men with a wise look beneath their eyebrows. The Arab, as a class, is of fine physique, large of limb, broad of countenance, and with strongly-marked features. His strength is physical rather than intellectual. He looks as though he could hit

16 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

you very hard if your hobnailed boot inadvertently descended on his bare foot. But he is terribly lazy, and may often be seen asleep in his own shop when business is slack. Enterprise he has none. If it please Allah to refuse him customers, then Allah be pleased, that's all !

The road to the left, as you paddle down Ashar Creek, is called "the Strand." I do not know who gave it that name, but it is comforting to think there are humorists even in Mesopotamia. Several of the more important shops are along here, and the editorial offices of the *Basra Times*—a daily paper much appreciated wherever it is read. The road, however, is a bad one of many ruts and holes, and typical of the state of disrepair formerly existing. It runs parallel with the creek as far as Basra City, which, if remarkable for nothing else, at least possesses a cinema-theatre and a vaulted bazaar, refreshingly cool in the summer. In other respects Basra is very similar to Ashar, though less varied and interesting.

We were given quarters in Ashar Barracks, about a mile from the river. When we arrived the barracks were deserted. We used the first

floor both to sleep and eat in, making our own arrangements for food and cooking. They were crude but efficient, and no one had a right to complain. To-day an official officers' mess has supplanted the odd collection of knives, forks and plates, mess-tins, bottle and mugs, which we once dignified with that name. There was not accommodation for all of us here, and a few had to sleep outside under canvas. This we considered luxury enough, until one night an untimely thunderstorm transformed the ground we slept on into a pond several inches deep. Not until then did the significance of active service begin to take root in our minds.

Nevertheless, I would not give the impression that it is impossible to get any enjoyment in Basra. It is difficult, certainly, but not impossible. I once went to a very good open-air concert there on a wonderful star-lit night in November. Some four hundred men and most of the sisters from the Base hospitals composed the audience, and it was here I first heard that most delirious and sugary of ballads :

If you were the only girl in the world,
And I were the only boy !

18 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

It was all very enchanting, and appropriately Eastern in sentiment, if not in tune. Shortly afterwards the song was heard all over Mesopotamia. I have no doubt the General Staff hummed it when they had nothing else to do. The men echoed it in shivering tones at "stand to" in the morning, and at night, when you went your round of the trenches, a sentry might be heard whistling it softly to himself as he kept watch. Perhaps with a hurried movement he would replace the photograph in his pocket which he was trying to discern by the white ray of the moon. It made you think, as you returned to your dug-out. . . . But this has nothing to do with the place I am describing.

At its best Basra is a disappointing city, uncompromisingly Eastern in aspect and of a character to suggest that on no account will it consent to become Westernized. At nightfall, however, it takes on a more promising appearance. If there is any beauty at all in Mesopotamia it is not to be found during the day. It comes by dawn or at sunset, or it catches you coldly at night with an effect of moon and palm. In the evening Ashar puts on another

garment, cooler and prettier-hued. The sky turns slowly to shades of palest pink and mauve, and the evening star, timidly appearing, sparkles like a diamond on a pillow of silk. A great blaze of red flares behind the palm-trees, and dies away. The clamour and heat of the day are over. Out on the river a British cruiser signals a message in quick, winking flashes, and from the depths of the town a strange drumming and beating of cymbals denotes that the curtain at the Arab theatre has just gone up.

CHAPTER III

ORDEAL THE FIRST

NO one who has not marched in Mesopotamia can have any conception of what it is like. I do not mean to say that marching was any easier in the other theatres of war. It was probably quite as hard ; but I am positive it was not harder. There are times, certainly, when to march in Mesopotamia is no more arduous than to do the same thing in Kensington Gardens. (Forgive the sublime comparison !) These are the cool, crisp, cloudless days of winter : hard tracks and a mercifully moderate sun. But when our draft of men set out on its two-hundred-mile jaunt from the Base to the firing-line, there were no roads, or even tracks, to guide us—nothing at all except a compass, and the thin silver ribbon of the river a gleam in the distance. Occasionally a little pathway trodden by the Bedouin Arabs condescended to point out the way, but soon it

disappeared, as if with malicious intent, and we were in much the same plight as a country villager entering a London tube station for the first time. But the consequences of getting lost in the plains of Mesopotamia were incalculable.

When we left Basra many of us imagined that we were marching straight up to Kut. Four months later we were still entrenched outside it, wondering whether the garrison could ever be relieved. Except that our ignorance of the military situation was abysmal, it was curious how the idea got abroad that we were bound for Kut. We believed anything on first landing in Mesopotamia, for the simple reason that we knew nothing of the country or of the fighting in progress there. We were beginning life all over again.

On the day of disembarkation at Ashar we did not know that the most desperate and hopeless battles were being fought some thirty miles from Kut. We did not know that we were hurrying up to replace the casualties sustained in these engagements. We did not know it would take us a month to arrive within sight of the firing-line. We did not know what a firing-

22 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

line was like. Perhaps that was why we set out with so light a step.

Where ignorance is bliss

'Tis folly to be wise.

The evening before the start, having, as I thought, got everything ready (though I could fill a page with the things I forgot), I left my tent for a stroll outside Ashar Barracks. Night had come—cool, blue, and starry. It was an opportunity for a peaceful walk. Unfortunately I was joined by my friend Archer—a man with a pronounced drawl, an Eton education, and an inexhaustible income. As one of our party he was more adept at making suggestions than carrying them out. He had a passion for drawing people into discussion on all manner of subjects, from the educational problem to the question where the best dinner in London was to be obtained. Here, of course, he spoke with authority, while for my part I bethought me of the tinned herrings we were shortly to consume. Of such ups and downs is life compounded.

This evening fatalism was the subject he had embarked upon—a choice which seemed to me peculiarly inappropriate to the moment. Few care to be convinced that their death

on a certain date is part of a prearranged plan that has been worked out like algebra on a blackboard. It is intolerable to think of it. Moreover, Archer waxed so garrulous I felt bound to assure him he was talking nonsense. I found his sympathies demoralizing to a degree, whereas mine—I laughed to think how easy it was to talk on a subject you know nothing about! The special feature of my talks with Archer was that we never could agree. (Fate probably ordained that too.) Military problems seldom engaged us, but, when it came to putting the social house in order after the war, this could easily be done after an hour's hot discussion beneath the palm trees.

I mention this incident as an example of how detached your thoughts may become even in the middle of carrying on a war. To talk about the war was the exception with most of us. We were even sorry for the leader-writers who had to think hard about it (I suppose) every day. But county cricket, London policemen, the best kind of tobacco, public schools, getting married, the theatre, or the novels of Hall Caine—these were subjects of entrancing interest to every one.

As if the war mattered!

24 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

The first day of our march was uneventful. We set out with a tremendous swing, like men who have just joined the Army. Very soon we had left behind the dust and palm-trees of Basra for the open desert. It was hard soil and good marching, and in a few hours we arrived at Gurmat Ali—a small village more clearly visible on the map than on the banks of the Tigris. The marching-posts we stopped at were often remarkable for pretentious and quite unpronounceable Arabic names, though never a house nor a tree marked their position on the desert. The Arabs in charge of our mahailas (two of these picturesque craft formed our second-line transport) never had any difficulty in locating these points or in uttering their names, and the glib way in which they spoke of them made you wonder of what material their tongues were made.

The second-line transport generally arrived several hours after the column had finished marching, as by cutting across country we were able to avoid the deep bends in the river which the boats had to negotiate. With our rations and tents carried by the mahailas, the only thing to do was to await their arrival as hope-

fully as possible. Sometimes it rained, and we sat down with immense cheerfulness to confront the situation. For a period we disguised our real feelings under a pretence at conversation. Not thus were hunger and discomfort to be thwarted, however, and a discussion arose as to how soon the fleet might be expected.

"They've got two huge bends in the river to get round," said Read quite cheerfully.

Read, a Regular officer of a light infantry regiment, was an optimist of the worst type. He remained imperturbably happy throughout the blackest crisis. Nothing could make him miserable.

"That'll delay them about three hours," I calculated, visualizing their barge-like progress.

"Three hours!" exclaimed Bevan scornfully, and he gave an uncomfortable laugh. "We'll be lucky if they get in by seven o'clock!"

We all looked at our watches. It was a quarter to three. A quarter to four, a quarter to five, a quarter to six.

"Hasn't anybody got anything to eat?" Bevan suddenly broke in, fumbling at his haversack. Nobody had had the originality to think

26 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

of that. Mess-tins were opened and haversacks rummaged. A packet of biscuits with sugar on them, some jam, half a tin of cocoa, a fragment of cheese, and two enormous Army biscuits were the result. Brushwood was collected from the stunted stubbly clumps dotting the plain, and Bevan, who had been to Canada and knew all about wood and fires, soon had a blaze going. The cocoa was instantaneous in reviving our spirits, and, when a few hours later we espied the white tops of the mahaila sails slowly drawing nearer, no Columbus sighting a new continent could have been more pleasantly thrilled. True, our ships would yet be some time coming, but they were coming.

Every night we pitched a camp on the banks of the Tigris, and in the vast silence of the desert we slept as soundly as in our beds in England.

Often the marching was so exhausting that when it was over we could have dropped down where we stood, leaving the war to take care of itself. It was on a certain black Sunday in January that our powers of endurance were first put to the test. Troops that have been long at sea require a great deal of exercise before

they are fully seasoned to campaigning. Apparently our men were suffering from the effects of three weeks' inactivity on board. They seemed unable to move. After a few miles it began to rain—a persistent swish that knew no ceasing. The hard ground was converted into a squelching marsh that clung in tenacious lumps to our feet. One or two men fell out and were picked up by the rearguard; others showed a disposition to be rid of their packs or to drink inordinately from their water-bottles. Picture to yourself a long straggling column of men crawling across the desert, each heavily laden with that vast museum of war material every soldier has to carry, their tired shoulders bent to a half-stumble, their eyes searching the ground for places that would afford a reliable grip. Marching under such conditions is a stiff, aching, maddening business that rapidly uses up a man. It was tragic to see our platoons doing their utmost to cover the ground, laboriously plodding on and on through the clogging mud until the heaven-sent order came to halt. To assist them was out of the question, though many were relieved of their rifles. To console them with guesses as to the distance

28 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

was equally useless. Nobody knew the distance and there was nothing to indicate it.

I can still see quite clearly that long, utterly weary column of men, impelled forward by no greater desire than to find the day ended and themselves at rest. At the halts every hour they dropped down like runners after a race. It took us seven hours to march the thirteen miles to Nahroum, where we encamped for the night. An hour we waited in the pouring rain before the mahailas arrived and we were able to sit down in our tents and review the unique happenings of that day.

Later on we found nothing unique in such an achievement. Before many weeks were over a march of this kind was a mere episode in the days and nights of unrelenting toil up at the Front. Every job is the worst in your experience until a still worse is encountered ; and no limit can be set to the unmitigated nastiness of some jobs. These you may forget, for it does no good to remember them. The man who has endured much and seen more than human eyes care to see can yet afford to smile if he has escaped the sword of Armageddon himself, or felt it but lightly.

At the beginning of things, before a shell has passed over your head, there is nothing which you dare regard as an unusual hardship or an extraordinary imposition, for you arrive in the midst of men who have "been through it" already—probably while you were buying tinned fruit at Basra. They are possessed of a quality which only experience can bring, and so far your only "experience" is a march of thirteen miles on a rainy day.

As yet we had covered but a tenth of the distance to the firing-line. We had done considerably less than a tenth of the work that was in store for us during the ensuing months. Hope shone out to us like a beacon in the night.

By a marvellous blessing we did not know that the task we were set was in very truth a hopeless one.

CHAPTER IV

FOOD AND MISFORTUNE

IT is a maxim on active service—whether in the firing-line or out of it—always to be as comfortable as you can. If comfort is impossible then you blame somebody else for it, thus relieving the mind, if not the body, of some annoyance. The Front is not a luxurious place, but luxury is never forgotten there ; and perhaps from amid the mud and misery of the trenches you think how tremendously happy you might be if things were different. Pictures of a huge easy-chair, a roaring fire, bedroom slippers and all the delights of decadence pass rapidly through your mind, until a large drop of water rolls from above the dug-out down your neck, and with a curse (or several curses) you huddle still deeper into the folds of your trench-coat.

Idle to philosophize ! There is nothing to be done when the rough hand of reality

strangles the life out of your dreams—nothing but to begin dreaming over again.

Every day, as soon as we had arrived at a marching-post and the men had settled down, we set to work to make ourselves as comfortable as Mesopotamia and the War Office would allow. The first consideration was a tent ; the next a meal. You can sleep if you are hungry, but not if you are cold. The evening meal was naturally a matter of deep interest to us after a long march, and when the time came round numerous inquiries were made—and had to be answered—as to the fare to be provided, and the time it was likely to take cooking.

“What are we having to-night ?” I asked Bevan, with an attempt to be casual. (After a time you give up this hypocrisy.)

“ ‘Bully-stew,’ ” Bevan replied.

Bully-stew is a mixture of bully-beef, onions and potatoes carelessly cooked in a dixie of boiling water. It is eaten when you are very hungry.

“But we had that last night !” Archer complained.

“Can’t help that, old boy : there’s nothing else,” said Bevan.

32 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

"Isn't there any bacon?"

"We finished it this morning."

"There are some sardines," put in Archer despairingly. "I saw them in the mess-box."

"I gave them to the servants for breakfast," said the Mess President.

"Good Lord!" I gasped in amazement, feeling it my turn to be indignant. "Why on earth?" I beheld as in a vision the close-packed luscious rows of fish. We had marched fifteen miles that day.

"Well, the men have worked very hard, you know," Bevan replied, urging the cause of the servants.

And at this we were silent, for it was undeniably true. Without their services o' nights we should have been lost.

The food question engaged us attentively every day. There was no lack of rations as a rule, but how to render them attractive often became a problem. Sometimes it was overcome by the cook, who in his way was a magician also. Or some one would unexpectedly produce a tin of asparagus or a packet of biscuits, and for the time being anxiety was allayed. Any one at home who displayed the same concern

over his meals as we did would have been set down at once as a gourmand. But we were in a different category. Between eight o'clock in the morning when we marched off and three o'clock in the afternoon when we stopped marching, we went foodless. We had no time to halt and cook a meal on the way, though the thought of doing so was irresistible.¹ Indeed, whatever the sphere of our activities, whether engaged in trench warfare or putting out an advanced guard, it was impossible to forget the prospect of bully-beef and the formidable biscuit. There was little else to be interested in. Mails were irregular ; there was scant respite from hard work ; there was nothing to do when the hard work was over. The last sheet of note-paper used up, the final chapter of a novel finished, and there was only the endless brown desert for company, with its jackals and ruins and terrible desolation.

In Mesopotamia you live for the hour, and anything which can help the hour to pass is welcome—unless it is an attack, or a night patrol. Even then the feeling is that it will be over soon, and you can go over to your friend

¹ There were no field-cookers in 1916,

34 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

Burton's dug-out and yarn to him for a space over a large mug of tea made without milk. You are always thinking of tea. It is impossible to forget these things. They constitute life. Unconsidered trifles become big with importance, while the heavy array of tasks crowding the day, and very often the entire night, lose their significance, or are regarded as grim unpleasantries to be faced as you would the dentist or an undertaker.

At present, however, we had not reached the advanced stage of trench warfare and attacks at dawn. We were only knocking at the door of battle. We still tramped the desert by day and slept peaceably by night. Tents were struck at 6.30 in the morning, and if you happened to be shaving at that hour they were struck just the same. The men had their orders, and the chance of scoring off an officer was not to be lost.

Seven o'clock breakfast was accompanied by a stamping of feet and a rubbing of hands, like suburban grocers wishing you good-day. At eight o'clock we moved off, hoping against hope to escape the rain and the floods. Sometimes we encountered a stretch of icy-cold water half a mile long which somehow had to be crossed. It

was the platoon commander's part to plunge in unhesitatingly as if he enjoyed it—merely to show his contempt for so trifling an obstacle as water.

How bitterly cold it was on those mornings ! We wore " shorts " of thin khaki drill, and waiting about for the column to move off was as chilly and unnerving as when you stand with coat off ready for the start of the mile handicap at school. Oh, it was far worse than that ! There was nobody of feminine charm or sporting instinct to admire our achievements ; no enthusiastic cheer from the visitors' enclosure ; no romance whatever in fact ! Nevertheless, this tropical kit (the recollection of which brought the absurd dream to our minds) gave a perfect freedom in marching which heavier gear could never have done.

At Kurna we suffered such a downpour of rain as is not often experienced even in Mesopotamia. It poured in ceaseless torrents for eighteen hours, until our tents were uninhabitable. At the very moment we should have been going to bed we were compelled to roll up our valises and sit on them to prevent all our possessions being ruined. We took this uncomplainingly at first, and the humorists among

36 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

us made a few harmless jests to keep up their reputation. Gradually we relapsed into silence. Somebody took a peep outside. It was snowing! There could be no mistake about it. Presently the snow stopped, but the rain clattered down harder than ever, and the wind howled mournfully. Water dripped through the tent as from a leaky tap, and we had to shift about from place to place to avoid the splashes. A single hurricane lamp shedding an anæmic light over us all suddenly flickered and went out, to shine no more. The rain poured on merrily. Presently, after many attempts, Bevan lit a candle, but it seemed quite as easy to shiver in darkness as in light, and when a gust of wind deliberately blew it out he resigned himself to the inevitable.

Slowly the night passed. At one time it seemed immaterial whether it passed or not. Humour had flown to other regions and left us frowning. At dawn it was still raining, and, looking at the inches of water at our feet, we decided to repitch the tent altogether as soon as the rain stopped. If the rain never stopped——

At midday the sun came out, and we beheld

it with the joy of fire-worshippers. Misery unutterable had stamped the night ; our limbs ached with constant huddling in the same comfortless position ; we longed for warmth and dryness, some hot food, and, if it were conceivable, a hot bath. Generally it was out of the question for more than one officer to have a bath at a time, as wood was scarce and to be treasured, and it was half a mile to the river for water.

Kurna in the rain (or in the sun) is a place of depthless depression and gloom. We had been glad enough to get there, but we were gladder still to get away. Early in 1916, when these misfortunes befell us, its prosperity was limited to a few mud-huts and Arab tents, a Supply and Transport depot, a wooden telegraph office, and a small native bazaar. At night a moon of pale gold gleamed through the palm-groves and lit up the scattered ruins of the place with sickly radiance. It was lifeless here—the last place on earth where you would expect to find beauty, or even a promise of it. Nature, unladylike for once, seemed entirely indifferent to her appearance.

38 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

As soon as the weather turned favourable we left Kurna for Amara. The desert still lay before us—sad, and chillingly desolate. It seemed you might walk for ever over that dead, trackless soil and never strike a human habitation. There were days when this emptiness of view struck a queer apprehension to the heart, as of some portent not to be thrust aside, but ever enchaining the attention. Such a sense of loneliness could only be overcome by action by some vigorous diversion to occupy the mind. It was the hour of waiting that seemed so black, when we had to remain in patient idleness until the mahailas arrived, and we could busy ourselves with pitching a camp. In the meantime, here we sat between the sky's infinity and the earth's emptiness ; here we lingered—minute living specks on the dead desert. The silence and the coldness of it seemed a mockery. You were helpless against it—a nonentity. The most profound resource, the most admirable of Crichtons could have availed nothing in this wilderness. It made you wish that a witch would come flying on a broom from Baghdad with a magic carpet under her arm, that there and then you might sail away into the very

heart of civilization ; of crowded streets and familiar homes and faces. Out here—the deathliness of it ! Tragedy must have been born in Mesopotamia !

CHAPTER V

THE FORBIDDEN QUESTION

BETWEEN Kurna and Amara, a distance of seventy-five miles on foot, there is a splendid mosque. It is called Ezra's Tomb and is kept in order by the Jews, who visit it regularly as a place of pilgrimage. From afar its enamelled dome shows a brilliant green amid the sombre colouring of a group of date-palms. On approaching closer, however, its green turns to turquoise—by what process it is difficult to say. To enter it, boots and puttees have first to be removed. Inside there are many inscriptions in Hebrew, and in the centre of the floor a baize-covered edifice built four-square, and said to contain the earthly remains of the Prophet. A little window has been inserted in one of the walls—apparently to tantalize visitors, for on looking through it nothing is to be seen. Several of us indulged in a much-needed wash beneath the shade of

this tomb, using the river-bank as a bathroom. The water was freezing cold, but Bevan (who had slept on the snow in Canada) was dauntless, and took a complete bath, to the surprise and embarrassment of the local Arabs. He also made a name for himself by recovering one of the men's boots which he espied floating down the river to Basra.

The Tigris that night was entrancingly beautiful. The dying sun caught the surface of the water with a glory of iridescent colour—gold and grey; emerald, silver and blue. Such beauty seemed incongruous, unreal, amid this acreage of ugliness. Rapidly the sky darkened, and the farther river-bank became a broad band of black against the deepening blue of evening. A lonely peace held the whole world, and you wondered what devilry it was that turned quietness into clamour, harmony into discord, friendliness into bloodshed.

A day or two later we reached Amara—a town of some size as towns go in Mesopotamia. Very gradually we were getting nearer to Kut. There was a good covered bazaar here and a row of substantial houses along the right bank of the river with overhanging upper stories of

42 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

carved wood-work. It would have been pleasant to have stayed here, but the next day we were marched off in a great hurry, as though our presence in Amara were undesirable.

This was a disappointment. The town looked full of life after the stupid monotony of the desert. The river was alive with P.¹ boats, tugs, motor-launches and other craft. Camps in a neat white order dotted the plain, and you thought enviously of the untroubled life of the men staying there. Here they were and here they remained, with every night a certainty of sleep, and every day an assured succession of meals. Regular mails were theirs, newspapers, cold drinks in summer, an officers' club—verily, kings might live in Amara !

As for us, we had nearly a hundred miles to go yet, farther and farther into the heartless heart of Mesopotamia. Distantly to the north-east—a low, misty-grey wall faintly visible above the horizon—rose the Pusht-i-Kuh mountains forming the old Turco-Persian frontier. The highest peaks of this range, magnificently snow-capped in winter, tower some eight thousand feet above sea-level. No

¹ Paddle-boats.

other natural feature met the eye. Occasionally we passed Arab settlements, consisting of a few reed huts and dilapidated, draughty-looking tents whose inhabitants turned out to watch us go by. The women brought us baskets of eggs, the men batches of fowl held head downwards in clucking captivity. Behind them, yelling and screaming with excitement, ran a procession of naked children, to whom we were evidently objects of immeasurable delight.

Little children in Mesopotamia, from all appearances, have a splendid time of it, despite the fact that they have no stockings to hang up at Christmas. Indeed, they seldom possess any clothes at all. In the streets of Basra, Amara and Baghdad, just as in India, they run about naked and happy all day long, and at night they continue to play games long after our English children have been tucked up and are dreaming. But I doubt whether the dreams of the Arab child are as sweet or as enchanting as those of his nursery friends from the West, though he has the same wondering eyes and the same everlasting laughter.

With the exception of these miserable villages, and occasional mud ruins of no interest what-

44 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

ever, we could see nothing. Marching under such conditions very soon becomes mechanical ; you move along with a sort of unconscious volition. To counteract this effect a good plan is to become so engrossed in thought as to lose all idea of your immediate surroundings. I found this ruse surprisingly successful at times. But often when lost in the delicious realms of romance, or taking middle-and-leg at a Saturday afternoon cricket match, the column would come to an abrupt halt, and I would be brought confusedly to a standstill with my nose perilously near the muzzle of Private Biffkin's rifle. I used to regard this rude awakening as one of the minor horrors of the war.

It is fortunate all things come to an end—even books about Mesopotamia. Towards the middle of February, 1916, when the situation outside Kut was a grave one, we began to see an end to our march in the dimly-discerned outline of Orah—at that time the General Headquarters of the Tigris Corps. By then we were hard and fit, and felt capable of winning any battle in which fortune might engage us.

I remember approaching Orah from Shaik

Saad, our last halting-place. In the distance was a forest of mahaila masts, and a curl of black smoke rising from the river. Somewhere beyond this region, at once invisible and incomprehensible, was the Front. As we got nearer a vast encampment opened out to us, teeming with activity and the toil of men. Spanning the river, like a black dotted line, was a bridge of boats, while below it a grey monitor lay motionless at anchor—a refreshingly dignified and up-to-date spectacle: On all sides there was evidence of a steady, unceasing labour, as in the preparation of some gigantic project.

That project was the relief of Kut. Mile by mile the Relief Force had battled its way from Ali Gharbi, where reorganization began after the retirement from Ctesiphon. There had been stubborn fighting and heavy casualties at Shaik Saad and the Wadi,¹ and nine days later a battle amid conditions of hopeless difficulty in the neighbourhood of Orah. By what we saw now, and still more by what we heard, it seemed clear the situation was a serious one, and that the next stage in the attempted relief

¹ Wadi—a canal after which the battle was named.

46 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

would in one way or another bring matters to a climax.

Orah close at hand was undeniably discouraging. The recent rains had submerged it in a vile coating of mud, and viscous pools of water shimmered at intervals along the river-bank. Through this camp we threaded a laborious way, stumbling and cursing at each foot of the road. Really it was not a road : it was simply the direction followed by troops, transport and guns on their way to and from the firing-line. The path of ruts and uneven depressions they made was called, for convenience, a road. It had to be called something.

We reached the bridge of boats and thumped across it. To the north lay the flat, unending desert, obstinately colourless and the same ; beneath us the river, winding away in a curve until it disappeared like a flash of silver south of Kut. We wondered dimly what was happening up there—and pushed on. A Staff-Major, looking conspicuously dapper and energetic, informed us we would be attached to an Irish Regiment who had lost heavily in their last action. Accordingly we sought them out, introduced ourselves, and settled down in the

same rest camp—the pale-faced New Army men from home rubbing shoulders with the tried “die-hards” of a Regular Battalion.

That day may be set down as one of elementary initiation into the ways and customs of a fighting unit. The ordeals of active service threatened us like a reconstituted Star Chamber. All that had gone before was negligible, petty, without significance. It didn't count. It was merely the chloroform before the operation.

What sort of an experience was it to fight? This was the question each of us sought to ask, and which, by some unwritten etiquette, we could not ask. Life had resolved itself into a single necessity—that of doing implicitly what we were told to do. And for some inexplicable reason it seemed that even this might be fraught with difficulty, despite the fact that these men of the Irish Regiment were quite ordinary men, hard and healthy-looking of course, but with nothing superhuman or extraordinary about them.

We were detailed to companies and told our duties. My company commander, Tarrant, was a heavily-built man with a reputation for coolness in action and ability to command.

48 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

But his appearance denoted neither energy nor resource. His whole attitude to the war—yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow—was one of pronounced and unvaried boredom. Boredom was written on his face and in his deportment. As he walked (he never marched) he twirled his cane negligently, and when he laughed it was as if laughter were the only thing worth while. Probably it is in Mesopotamia.

Then there was Dayton, a tall and cumbrous man with a large head, sleepy eyes, and close-cropped hair. He was nicknamed "the Hun," owing to his passion for singing German melodies at inconvenient hours. There was the machine-gun officer, O'Hara, a quiet, humorous, efficient man whom every one liked and respected. Wilson, too, was in my company, noticeable for his thoughtful eyes and Gladstonian chin. He and I were old friends, and we were overjoyed at the opportunity of talking over "the good old days" in England, when we shared the same delightful house overlooking the sea, notoriously unwarlike, and perfectly innocent of every murderous intention.

There was not much room in the tent with

our valises and equipment, but we were assured of warmth at night, and in February this is a consideration. For those of us new to the game there was a strong element of adventure in our attachment to this war-scarred regiment. We made silent individual resolves to live up to its reputation.

In the meantime we were given as much rest as possible. Remarkable to think there would be no further marching on the morrow ! And yet anything might happen on the morrow. It was an incredible world—very mad, but very interesting.

There was silence in the camp, and “the Hun” having finished his carolling and the jackals their nightly serenade, we got into our valises and dropped off to sleep.

CHAPTER VI

ONE NIGHT

THE attack on the position at Es Sinn—seven miles from Kut-el-Amara—was a failure. The very utmost was done to make it a success, but at that time the very utmost was not enough. The initial attack on Dujailah Redoubt, which should eventually have left the way clear to the minor defences around Kut, was beaten off with terrible ferocity. When the Turk decides to fight he fights well. Either he defends, with all his vigour and cunning, or he packs up his dates and small arms ammunition and disappears. On this occasion he poured forth hell-fire from trenches cleverly arranged in tiers, and it was a superiority none could withstand. One officer and a few men, fighting superbly, entered the position—one officer and a few men out of twenty thousand.

After this repulse we were to have attacked

again, but lack of water made this impossible, and we were compelled to retire. Nobody in the ranks believed that tale about "lack of water." They could only believe what they saw.

It is not my intention to explain why this particular attack on Kut was a failure, since anybody with plenty of time to waste can find out that for himself. On the day in question we ourselves did not know, and I am writing (try to imagine) but a few hours after the event. We knew nothing, and were expected to know nothing. We did what we were told.

The first thing we were told to do was to march—an effort which kept us continuously moving for nearly twelve hours—from six o'clock on the evening of March 7th to 5.30 the following morning.

It was a cool, grey, average morning like Tuesday at home ; but unlike this monotonous week-day, it was the culminating point in days and nights of hard unobtrusive activity behind the lines. We had stood still for weeks, waiting for generals and the weather to make up their minds. Now we were going to move.

.

52 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

Out across the desert we went to the position of assembly. This was indicated by a lamp twinkling gaily against the sky a mile or two off. Hundreds of battalions seemed to be moving towards it with the drowsy intentness of crawling moths. You felt a person of discouraging insignificance amid this mass of men. Individually you mattered not an atom ; but as a spoke in the slowly-turning wheel you mattered immensely. Indeed, such was the importance attached to your assistance in affairs, so vital your little unseen part, that if you fell out without permission you ran the risk of being shot. In any case you ran the risk of being shot. It was clear that while we were negligible as individuals, with names and faces and a thousand separate interests, we were collectively of vast importance, a power on earth, as all well-organized, pugnacious communities are. In a day or two, you thought, the Relief Force would figure in the newspapers, on the placards, in the big London clubs. There would be columns about us in a day or two.

“ General Aylmer’s force, attacking the Turkish positions on the right bank of the Tigris at daybreak yesterday. . . . ”

But as yet the attack was unwritten history. We were still massing at the point of assembly.

Presently, when it was dark, we halted. Across our front an endless succession of Ghurkas passed, silent but for the rhythmic click of swinging equipment. On our right, guns and transport rattled along incessantly. They had the continuous sound of a rotary press or big engineering works heard from a distance. On our left more Indian troops filed noiselessly into position, approaching no one knew whence. From every direction troops, guns and transport secretly appeared and were allotted a place in the column. Somebody seemed to be controlling all this by pressing buttons; it was all inhuman; it was an enormous machine.

“Just go down and tell them to shut up making such a row,” Tarrant rapped out to me, hearing a noise in his company.

I went down to my platoon and shut them up, and we moved on again past the starting-point. The night was dark and moonless, and the lightning, constantly flickering, lit up the clouds in jagged black outlines. Occasionally it was so brilliant there seemed a possibility of our

54 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

movements being discovered. The whole desert was alight with blinding blue flame. Suppose we *were* discovered! Suppose a heavy fire were suddenly opened on us without warning, or one of the land mines were to blow up we had been told about? You could not help thinking of these eventualities.

And yet, after several hours of slow movement (as if you were continually coming out of church), it was much easier not to think at all. I should say the whole battalion stopped thinking at about 2 a.m., when we seemed to have been marching ever since we could remember. The effect of a long march coming in the middle of rapidly-moving events is to destroy all idea of time and sequence. You reach a nebulous intermediate stage that apparently had no beginning and as easily may have no end. Whereupon all things cease to matter but the immediate business of putting one foot before the other, one foot before the other—eternally.

Soon we began moving along with unusual energy and pace; but it was too good to last.

“Who are you?” A voice shouted out of the darkness.

“The Petershires.”

" Well, for God's sake stop—stop where you are ; don't move ! " said the voice, and two arms appeared in the air, policeman-wise, to hold us up. Then the figure rushed off distractedly and we saw no more of him.

My company commander sat down on the ground and nodded sleepily.

" 'S'-the-time ? " I inquired.

There was an interval.

" Ha'pa's-three," came the reply.

In two hours, then, we ought to be in position, and the attack would begin.

The men staggered to their feet and moved on again. They reminded you of snails crawling stupidly to a distant cabbage. A few cursed ; one or two joked ; the majority were silent.

Light began to illumine the even folds of cloud to the east in glimmers of pale gold. We were moving faster now. Brigades had split up ; transport had disappeared ; dim columns of men could be made out advancing on a wide front. They were swinging along with the smooth confident stride that makes attacking look so easy.

I was ordered to remain at the Aid Post with

56 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

four other officers—a captain and three sub-alterns. We were in reserve. As soon as casualties occurred we would be informed.

Two hundred yards ahead the battalion lay extended in the open ready to support the attacking Brigade. In the distance was the long low ridge known as Sinn Banks—the ridge which the Turks had made impregnable.

We perceived that the battalion was now isolated. The Kut Relief Force had disappeared, but behind us a line of black patches extended at wide intervals in a semicircle—little dark specks that certainly were not there five minutes ago.

They were guns.

CHAPTER VII

SENSATION

AN appalling crash rent the air, followed by a succession of faint "punks" that didn't seem to matter. The show had begun ; here was a bit of " the Great War " at first hand.

I will try to give a coherent idea of what this coming under fire meant. And the reason this is so difficult is because everything for the moment was *incoherence*, mental confusion, so far as I was concerned. Every faculty and nerve I had seemed torn asunder and made useless. The very moment when I should have been tuned to the highest pitch of efficiency I felt unable to lift a finger. That strange straining sense of disaster common to all of us for days past had become an effective and paralysing power. I had been preparing myself for this eventuality ever since I signed my name to an attestation paper in that paradise

58 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

which Londoners call St. James's Street. Yet an examination in theology or higher mathematics could not have found me less prepared.

I must confess outright that a few hours before the attack the thoughts which had crowded through my mind had been entirely selfish ones. I was burning and yet fearing to know what would happen—not to the Division—but to me. I cared nothing for what *would* happen, but I was intensely anxious to know nevertheless. I could not have been more anxious had I been going to the dentist or holding a duchess's baby. And I am certain that this feeling, despite its egotism, was a nearly universal one. A man is a man, after all, not the inanimate weapon he handles. And what further redeemed this anxiety from any sort of ignominy was that notwithstanding its self-centredness, its apparent aspect of self-importance, body and soul were alike ready to be thrown away, destroyed, trampled upon, if necessary. It was not the idea of sacrifice that was worrying at all ; it was the doubt whether that sacrifice would have to be made.

I do not mean to imply that there is anything heroic in acquiescence to the inevitable. You .

and I and a million others gracefully bend to military necessities without ever becoming heroes. I mean to say that quite independent of will, quite apart from all motive or intention, these unpleasant and unusual feelings exist ; they are there ; they overrun and put to flight every other feeling. All your halfpenny-paper dreams of coolness in action and bravery unsung lie hidden away in some inaccessible corner of your anatomy, and there they remain until you have sense and stability enough to rescue them.

I never imagined, as some people do, that I could go into action with the same air I might adopt in entering a chemist's shop for a new toothbrush. That, of course, was how I should have liked to picture the crisis when it came ; but hitherto the crisis had not come. It was no more a part of my experience than poetry is part of a butcher's. And, whereas I knew exactly what manner best became a person entering a chemist's shop for a new toothbrush, I was crushingly unfamiliar with the best method of meeting stray shells from Turkish guns.

When the shelling began my mind was

60 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

numbed and incapable, and immeasurably stunned. It is no use saying it was not. As time went on I was seized with an intolerable fit of inertia that reminded me of nothing more clearly than a certain day in the Bay of Biscay, when "the damned ship lurched and slithered." Had I been actually in the firing-line no such paralysis would have possessed me. But to stand here waiting, as it were, for some enormous tragedy to take place, with no sort of drama happening at all, but ever about to happen, was beyond words unendurable.

It would have been a relief to get wounded. I could have shouted or fallen down, or become violent in the way men do when they are hit. I could have said "Damn!" repeatedly, like the hero of one of Mr. Wells's novels; and this would have released my increasingly congested feeling of impotence. As it was, I could only remain silent. I could only make a transparently feeble pretence at having been accustomed to this sort of thing from boyhood.

Captain Atterson, one of the party with me, looked grim, but otherwise unconcerned; Archer was manifestly uneasy, but taking it well; Summersley, pale but collected. As for

the doctor, he was whistling like an Englishman in his bath. I wondered what madness impelled a man to whistle when at any moment he might be dead. I resented this flippancy of his, though obviously it was the thing to do. From where he stood amid his pile of dressings and scissors and medical paraphernalia, I heard him say he wanted to collect some Turkish fuses as soon as there were any available. There was one he could see fifty yards behind our support line.

I went and picked up the fuse, and this act of heroism seemed to do me good. I began taking equipment off the wounded, emptying ammunition from their pouches, and trying not to notice their bloodless faces and broken limbs. In the distance there was a peculiar clanging roll of rifle-fire, evidently Turkish, and from behind a shattering chorus of explosions came from our guns. This noise was far more distressing than all the enemy's artillery put together. Indeed the Turkish fire, extraordinarily accurate on this as on most occasions, caused only a handful of casualties. These were severe, however : the victims would never fight again.

62 THE BAGGING 'OF BAGHDAD

The doctor stopped his cheerful whistling and busied himself with the cases at hand. His first was a hopeless one ; a private had received a bad shrapnel wound in the head. His head looked less like a head than a dreadful mess of blood, hair and bone. The stretcher-bearers held him in mid-air awaiting orders.

“ All right ; put him down there,” said the doctor, and he covered up the man’s face with a square of cotton gauze. For two hours the patient breathed stertorously, with a noise that was half a snore and half a gurgle. Then he gave a great sigh, his chest expanded till it lifted his body from the ground, and he fell back dead.

I reflected tritely that a few hours ago this man was strong and fit, with fifty years of life before him. He had written home hoping his mother was well as it left him at present. There was probably a girl somewhere who would have to be told. . . . And at the same time I realized I had no right to view the man’s death sympathetically, because any such approach to sentiment would disqualify me for things essentially *unsentimental*—hard, callous

things. In short—battle. I realized, moreover, that these other officers, so far from giving a thought to death, were deliberately refusing to recognize it, refusing even to acknowledge it as a possibility, as a thing which could overtake themselves. I concluded that I must do the same. It was evidently part of the business of war to dress the soul in a garment of iron. Possibly I had a soul, but the ore seemed no part of its composition.

Four men dug a hole in the ground, lowered the body into it, and covered it up with three feet of earth. One of the burial party, returning at a walk to his platoon, suddenly bent low, clutched his head with both hands, and ran back to the Aid Post pouring with blood. Another came in with his shoulder terribly torn by shrapnel, and never a word he uttered through the agony of having it dressed.

The uproar of guns and the whistle of enemy shrapnel continued intermittently. With the exception of a few white puffs of smoke in the distance it was beyond us to divine what all this was about. Presently, however, two men of the 8th Brigade came in—one with a slight wound in the arm, another with a nastier injury

64 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

to his head. They spoke with a noticeable Lancashire accent.

"How are we getting on up there?" the doctor asked.

"They've pushed us owt."

"Didn't we reach their trenches though?"

"We got in but they fetched us owt agen wi' bombs. We got cut up bad."

"That's hard lines," said the M.O., still working hard. "Now let's have a look at you."

He began snipping away at the man's clothes, talking joyously the whole time.

"I think you can walk," he remarked, when he had patched up the wounds. "The other man'll want assistance." He set down his instruments and watched the two soldiers out of sight.

The day wore on tediously, but the racket subsided. That was an intense relief after the hideous clamour of day. At nightfall the battalion withdrew about a mile and began to dig in, while the five of us at the Aid Post, having expended a great deal of energy on the construction of dug-outs, were ordered to leave them and rejoin our companies.

We solaced ourselves with the dry rations we

carried—bully-beef, biscuits and a little Bovril. It seemed vitally necessary to become interested in something—in eating or sleeping or in the delightful preoccupation of trench-digging.

The first thing we heard next morning was that the attack had been a failure and that the Force was to retire. It sounded incredible after these weeks of preparation. Why was it a failure? Why couldn't the advance be continued and Kut relieved? Why was the attack cancelled we had been ordered to make the previous day?

As soon as ask the moon the nearest way to heaven!

At eight o'clock that morning we could already see brigades beginning the withdrawal. It was unusually hot for that time of year, and a heavy mirage enveloped all distant objects in quivering layers of air. You could see the air rapidly fanning past in successive vapourish waves. Sinn Banks had slipped their moorings and floated in water—a desert Archipelago. Trees assumed blurred and trembling outlines, and it was impossible to say in which direction our columns were moving. But there was no

66 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

sound of battle now ; there was nothing to battle for. Nothing.

Our Brigade was detailed to act as rear-guard to the Division, and we were therefore held back until one o'clock. By this time the heat was intense, and the Turks, well aware of its shattering effect and of the heavy blow they had dealt us themselves, were not slow to add the finishing touches. At the appropriate moment, when the whole force was retiring, they brought their guns into play. The fire was heaviest at about four o'clock, when our Division was careering along in a rolling column of yellow dust towards the river. To add to our difficulties we were now without water, and, despite every effort to maintain march discipline, numbers of men fell out to drink from the stagnant pools we were passing. Mad with thirst, the danger of so poisonous a remedy escaped them. It mattered not what they drank, so long as they drank. One or two paid dearly for this folly afterwards. But how distinguish between folly and madness in such circumstances ? It was surprising so few lost their self-control.

There was no time to be sorry for these men. You were quite as badly off yourself. Some

sort of madness was raiding your brain also. You thought of all this in terms of exasperation. Why the devil couldn't the men wait for water? *You* had to wait.

We still made for the river, marching in line with the highest point of the Pusht-i-Kuh Hills, now brown and purple and a soft warm red from the setting sun. The whole Division was flying along like a motor-bus. It was amazing to see so large a body of men moving at such a pace. I remember how a certain General, at a time when matters were looking serious, deliberately wheeled round on his horse and halted to take stock of the situation. It must have done many men good to watch this cool, quite unflustered, rather imperial figure observing things unmoved, when all else was a stumbling, blaspheming column of men, and a great dust of transport.

You may take the view that this retirement was disorderly and demoralized; almost a rout. But this it was not. Because a man who is hurrying for the doctor finds his tie half-way round his neck, a bootlace undone and his hat at the back of his head, it does not follow these eccentricities are going to obstruct him. Prob-

68 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

ably they help him. Mr. G. K. Chesterton would very likely think so. The man in a hurry only steps out the faster, freed of all civilized impediments. Similarly with us. We wanted to get away, and we did get away—with all our guns, effectives and personnel. It was undignified, no doubt, but war is not a dignified affair. It was hurried to an ungentlemanly degree, but we were not thinking of being gentlemen. We considered the retreat an achievement, a thing well done. And it was.

Possibly you think there was no fight in the force after this disaster? But the reverse was the case. It was the case because it had to be so. We had fought once and we could fight again, said the Staff men. Reinforcements? Absurd! There weren't any. Extra transport for supplies? Out of the question! Kut must be relieved without these luxuries. So the day after the retirement we were out again on the way to Kut, and we smashed up an impertinent attempt on the part of the Turk to re-establish himself in our trenches at Abu Romān. We were exhausted, certainly, and not a little depressed. But after a cup of tea and such sleep as we could get, we fulfilled all the conditions

laid down by the War Office regarding "offensive spirit."

Not to anticipate events, however, we reached the Sanna position, four miles from Orah, at 7.30 the same evening. An extreme vigilance had still to be maintained owing to the uncertainty of the situation. As time progressed we found that the more exhausted and hungry we became, the greater the need for this particular form of vigilance. Active service is full of these spiteful jokes. When in the act of settling down, we were given to understand that unpleasant things might happen "at any moment." We had to be in "a constant state of readiness to move," like a pantechicon or a fire-engine.

The following day, March 10th, we rested. At nine o'clock in the evening rumours spread that we were to abandon the Sanna position for a further frolic out "in the blue" as the desert was called. (It was also called "the jungle.") A ridiculous report was added to the effect that the Turks had got round our flanks and were attempting to cut our communications at Shaikh Saad. In which event, catastrophe would have overtaken the Kut Relief Force in

70 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

even greater measure than was to be the case. Nevertheless, these rumours were sufficient to prevent us nodding off to sleep before the war was over. They kept us alive. In default of rations, which were very scarce, we fed on them. But they were unpleasant diet for hungry men.

CHAPTER VIII

UP AT ABU ROMĀN

THE months of March, April and May formed a period of incredible misery and hardship. It is by no means easy to describe them in terms that will read as pure narrative rather than pure sensationalism, for more than anything else they brought with them sensations innumerable and surprises that were paralysing. You never awoke from this nightmare ; you could not yawn lazily in the morning and forget about it.

The position we held at Abu Romān, although only of passing importance, and the scene of very little serious fighting in 1916, was in many ways unforgettable. It was here I learned as I have never learned anything before what a laborious thing it is to dig all day and all night in successive shifts. I learned a great deal more than this, including much that I could have wished never to have learnt at all.

72 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

That is part of the callousness of active service. It makes you hard and fit and accustomed to horrors ; it builds up a formidable wall of nerves within you to withstand shocks ; it encourages (on occasions) independence of thought and action ; and probably this moral equipment will be useful to you one day.

But it teaches you a great deal which is perfectly futile from an individual point of view. I never wanted expert knowledge as to digging all day and all night, valuable to some people as that experience may be. But I could have dispensed with it. I hate digging. I never wanted to look on death or see batches of dead men. I am not interested in death. I appreciate bravery, and would be insufferably proud of a V.C.—if I had one ; but I could have afforded to remain ignorant of the fact that bravery does not always pay ; that it is often foolhardiness and ignoble tragedy. The illusion would have bettered the reality. And so with much more that I learnt at the Front.

“ But this is active service ! ” you reply. “ You must take the good with the bad. ” And I can only answer what a very obvious remark that is, though it was not the one I wanted.

As for taking the good with the bad—we all do that : there is nothing else to do.

Up at Abu Român life was constantly unpleasant and frequently “a near thing.” It was as if the General Staff were making us do penance for some gigantic mistake—possibly of their own ; certainly not of ours. Twenty-four hours out of twenty-four, until light and darkness had no meaning, we dug positions. Having dug in, our line was changed and we moved forward again nearer the enemy. Our moves may be likened to the heroism of cover-point or mid-on who “comes in a bit” when the batsman is feeling nervous. Our tactics must have had the same demoralizing effect. Not that we ever worried about tactics ; there is very little of that in trench-digging ; but these things constantly worried and angered us. I recall how, having just completed a series of lunettes which we were to occupy, we were promptly marched into a position *in rear* of them before going out on a new bearing—to dig another position. After a time several of us refused to regard this as funny, and indulged in satire. But we still dug positions.

On another occasion we spent an unpleasant

74 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

night digging under fire. We were sent right ahead of a more than ordinarily advanced post, where we had to lie down flat for a few minutes until a " breeze " from an enemy machine-gun had subsided and movement was possible. Walking up and down the line with the dark, vigorous figures of the men working for their lives, and with an occasional sharp s-s-IP affecting your ears, you could hardly help wondering what part of your body would get in the way of the next bullet. Your knee, perhaps? Your eye, or the muscle of your arm? Your head in particular felt like an egg-shell, and the rest of your person, if less vulnerable, at any rate maddeningly exposed.

Silence was naturally imperative on night work of this kind, and I repeatedly told my men to keep quiet. One man, however, made a queer sound for all the world like a laugh. Somebody must have made a joke. A curious time to joke, I thought!

" Shut up!" I exclaimed in an undertone to him. " Why the deuce can't you keep quiet!"

The man made no reply. How was I to know, until he dropped his shovel and fell on

his knees, that one of his eyes had been blinded ? The night was full of hideous surprises and swift terrors of this kind, but we knew they could not last long, as we had to be back before dawn.

At four in the morning, furtively, and stealing along past the dead, we withdrew to our old position. The sniping was intense, and thinking of it all and yet trying not to think, we felt as though we had come out of an Inferno. When we got back we lay down and stared at the sky until daybreak. The best thing that morning (if the least) was breakfast. It was a steady influence after the senseless melodrama of the past few hours.

After a time, however, you get used to the insanities of war, to its waste and bloodshed and brutality, and the pitiless demands it makes on men. You even get accustomed to its inevitability. Once you have reached that stage there is nothing to worry about : it is possible to carry on. I believe it is possible to do anything in Mesopotamia.

On rare occasions at Abu Romān the Staff left us alone. I made a special note of this at the time as yet another phenomenon to add to

76 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

the innumerable phenomena of Iraq. But it was only for a day. When the day was over they sent us news that the position we had dug under such unhealthy conditions the other night had been inadvertently flooded out by the Turks, and orders followed for immediate evacuation. The soil had been so hard and the work so strenuous that men had fallen asleep digging. When you attempted to arouse them they never stirred ; they were as dead men.

Immediate evacuation accordingly took place, and shortly afterwards we were relieved by the Manchester Regiment.

In such manner did life proceed. In retrospect, there can be no doubt that those days were merely an interim of probation—the sentence before the execution—for events were to follow of a character even more damaging to that pristine joy in life we had been careful to preserve since leaving England. We pretended not to mind, of course, whilst consumed with apprehension the whole time. Superficially, anxiety had never been further from our minds. “ Oh, I’m not worrying, old man,” you said, and began humming :

But when I tell them how wonderful you are . . . !

This effort restored you to a genuine cheeriness, and for a moment life took on an aspect of incredible happiness. You chattered confidently at the Company Mess in the evening. There was a man there who knew every corner of Colchester, where once you were stationed and always you complained.

"Were you at Hyderabad Barracks?"

"Yes," your friend replies.

"So was I—for about three months. Do you know the absurd little café in High Street where every one used to go? Damn good cream buns! And their coffee! I remember dining there one night——"

"'Ow will yer carry yer coat, sir?" the voice of your servant breaks in.

A moment of horrible anti-climax follows.

"Oh, roll it up, Bradley!" you fling out angrily, as if the war were Bradley's fault.

"Shove it on the transport—or in the river if you like!"

The interruption brings you back to battle and the demands of to-morrow. It is impossible to help thinking of to-morrow (which may be as ghastly as yesterday) and of a succession of ever-so-distant to-morrows ending with the

78 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

war itself or with some violent and quite uninvited happening to yourself. You have a stupid and insistent idea at the back of your head that in the next "frolic" you may be killed. You reflect that these thoughts must be put away, forgotten.

But there were things you could not forget : the horrible scarcity of water, the extra long spells in the trenches owing to difficulties of relief, no possible change of clothes or boots, exhausting night watches, and last of all the extremely poor issue of rations. Confronted with such a catalogue of troubles you can understand how far removed was Abu Romān from the traditional luxury and enchantment of Sinbad's country.

CHAPTER IX

“OH, TO BE IN ENGLAND”

APRIL brought with it a new and unpleasant set of circumstances to dispel the illusion that hitherto we had been on active service. Thunderstorms of unprecedented severity swamped the Division out, giving us the appearance, as we stood there in the open, of men who looked upon rain as a form of enjoyment.

Nor was this all. As a climax to the affairs of war we bore the brunt of a particularly heavy counter-attack hastily organized by the Turks (and a few Germans) at Bait Aiessa. It was as quickly disorganized a few hours later, but not without fighting against first-class Turkish troops—fighting that none of us would care to experience again.

I will return to this attack later; but with such an opportunity for retaliation I refuse to leave the weather alone. It was disgraceful

80 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

weather. It was the wettest weather on earth or in heaven. It made you wonder why Mesopotamia, having been buried in decent oblivion some twenty-five centuries ago, could not have been as decently forgotten altogether. We were accustomed to most things, but to this unending deluge no honest man could pretend indifference. It conquered ourselves and the Turks simultaneously, and until it chose to behave in a more rational manner neither side could continue hostilities. For days the rain swept down with unimaginable violence, doing its utmost to render the ground we were to attack over a huge slithering lake of mud. Infantry movement over such a surface was out of the question.

The attempts of the lightning to do damage were almost as successful. It was apparently bent on some extravagant devilry of its own. Intense blue flashes of fire, brilliantly trembling, shot across the horizon and were gone. These displays were continuous. At times they seemed to reveal heaven itself—an appalling chamber of light rimmed in by the blackest clouds. The lightning over, we were left to grope a way dizzily and insignificantly across

the freezing marsh again. All through the night while this went on we walked up and down, down and up, shivering and cursing and occasionally dreaming—dreaming of fire that was heaven and of ice that was hell.

Night passed like a funeral.

The rain having done its worst, the Turks attempted to do theirs. At a later stage it may be interesting to inquire into the effect of Turkish counter-attacks on human beings—if human has any meaning as applied to men who are bent on killing each other. But for the moment it is necessary to go into an elementary matter of tactics if this uncomfortable trench warfare is to be understood. Briefly the position was this : our force on the left bank of the river under General Gorringe was definitely held up at Sannaiyat. The Tigris here runs due west, and the great strength of the position lay, first, in the very narrow front we had to attack over, and, secondly, in the fact that it could not be outflanked. There was no opportunity to manœuvre. To the north lay the Suwaikiyah Marsh : quite impossible to get round there. The cavalry tried—and came back again. To the south lay the river : move-

82 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

ment equally impossible here. And on his bare mile of front the Turk had entrenched himself in the completely successful Turkish manner. He meant to stay there and he did stay, using all his cunning, all his wonderful tenacity, all his cleverness with machine-guns to that end.

Three heavily-pressed counter-attacks on this position involving severe casualties to both sides had failed, and failed utterly. These were made on the 5th, 6th, and 9th of April. The Turks, equally with ourselves, realized that Sannaiyat was the key to the whole position. It constituted the defence not of Kut alone but of Baghdad also, as events a year later were to prove.

In April, 1916, therefore—to explain how these attacks eventuated—the General Staff had planned to strike hard at Sannaiyat in the hope of dislodging the enemy and getting in behind Kut. But this effort, as has been said, was a failure. Simultaneously it was intended to continue the advance up the right bank of the river, towards Sinn Banks. You will understand why in a moment.

First of all look at the map. You will see that I have attempted to follow these operations

in brief chronological order from the battle of the Wadi on the left bank, to Dujailah Redoubt about fifteen miles farther up on the right ; thence, after the retirement described in Chapter VII, to the unhealthy precincts of Bait Aiessa. —

It was thought (quite erroneously) that if guns could be brought sufficiently far up-stream on the right bank opposite Sannaiyat we could enfilade the Turkish trenches with such effect as to render them untenable. With the additional artillery thus brought into play hope was not abandoned that a third infantry attack might prove successful. To assist this, the Turkish position at Bait Aiessa was attacked on the morning of April 17th with very good results. Primarily it cleared the way for our guns ; it compelled the enemy to retire ; it demoralized him ; it confused him as to our intentions ; and incidentally it raised our own spirits tenfold. Unfortunately the most important effect it was to have had—namely the clearing out of the Turks at Sannaiyat—never became anything but a purely theatrical one. The Turks didn't clear out ; their position remained as impregnable as ever.

84 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

Having watched our guns blowing to smithereens the narrow section of front on the other side of the river, we on the south hardened ourselves to the usual crop of rumours. For once rumour turned out truth. We heard that all our attacks had failed—and our casualties were formidable.

About a week later our own turn to attack was indicated by the usual signs. We dug incessantly. We were maniacs at digging. Physical exhaustion was rapidly nearing its limit. At length the whole Battalion received orders to dig sufficient head-cover for the night prior to attacking in the morning. By then we had arrived at that forlorn and dry condition, both of mind and body, which is able to welcome anything as a change. Lately we had been on quarter rations ; there was no jam and there were now no cigarettes. Preposterous to expect letters ! Preposterous to expect anything ! A savage attack seemed the only alternative to jamless meals and no tobacco.

By seven o'clock the day after, we had captured three nullahs and three lines of trenches with small loss to ourselves. The ground we had to move across was dangerously

flat ; the Wily One as wily as ever. But for once he was beaten. It was something new to us, this success, and, like most successes, it had an effect which was extraordinarily inspiring. It was astonishing to observe the change from speechless depression to almost puerile delight which infected every one in the battalion in the space of about half an hour.

My company commander was badly wounded, however, and four other officers were put out of action. A party of bombers was blown to death by a single shell, and I recall some revolting sights in the field that morning. Groups of Turks lay huddled in strange dead attitudes in the enemy's advanced posts. Here and there blood coloured the soil in accidental patches, and pathetic-looking scraps of clothing and equipment told a tale that would have sent a shiver down the backs of Ali Baba and his Forty Thieves.

But up in the captured trenches all these horrors were forgotten. As an example of *moral*, no Press representative would have dared to omit our traditionally mirthful faces from his illustrated paper. I began to think out headlines to inscribe under them ;

86 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

THE SMILE OF VICTORY.

THE WINNING WINK.

TOMMY LOVES A FIGHT.

HAPPINESS IN THE TRENCHES,
and other tremendous rubbish.

In his hurried departure the enemy had left behind quantities of very eatable dates, which we immediately swallowed with the zest of savages. There were excellent German bivouac sheets, less useful Turkish currency notes, and Mausers by the score. I accepted the legacy of a useful prismatic spy-glass, evidently the property of a British officer in former days, for it was made in London and bore the official Indian Army stamp. Had it been a buckled bicycle wheel or a sixpenny iron poker, I should have kept it just the same, for it was made in London.

These minor captures put us all in an unusually agreeable frame of mind. But by half-past six the same evening this light-hearted attitude had to be discarded. For at that hour the Turks were getting well ahead with their counter-attack, which they began in a very virile and impolite and hearty manner. This was the real battle of Bait Aiessa, for which the

enemy, attacking on a very narrow front, mustered ten thousand of his best men. A Press *communiqué* would have said simply : " Fighting continues."

But perhaps that is a phrase which requires explanation.

CHAPTER X

BATTLE

I CANNOT say exactly what happened at the battle of Bait Aiessa. I question whether anyone can. An hour before the event I was not thinking of battle. In all likelihood I was thinking of Trafalgar Square or of tennis at Felixstowe, overlooking the sea. I prefer thinking of these things. I recall that on the afternoon preceding the attack a serenity and quietude filled the air that prophesied war to none of us. At that hour we were consuming large pieces of stale bread weighted down with a rare commodity known as marmalade. We ate heartily, not having seen marmalade for years—that is to say, for a very long time. We greeted it like a British prisoner from Germany—impulsively.

And in the middle of this repast—*bang!* and a succession of similar bangs. Whereupon the banquet broke up and the dance began.

At first we paid little attention to this demonstration, realizing that in Mesopotamia the enemy rarely attacked with distinction. We were in the support line, and knew there were good men in front of us. Nevertheless, the accurate fire directed at our trenches not only made us feel very uncomfortable, but gave rise to much resentment, for it happened to coincide with afternoon tea. We ought, of course, to have regarded this interruption cautiously, as the spark kindling the flame. Instead, we refused to regard it with any sort of apprehension at all.

Suddenly and without warning an amazing rumour got round that our line had broken. Looking over the parados we saw that broken it was; visibly broken. The position was a grave one. Overwhelming numbers of Turks—all in the worst possible temper—had flung themselves against us with a power that redoubled in desperation and a courage which, it must be admitted, did them honour. They risked everything without hesitation—carelessly, frantically. They launched their attack in massed formations—the old *agmen versus acies* principle anew—

90 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

and they found to their chagrin how ill-judged and costly an affair this method could be. For, in addition to those who were cut off and captured, they lost thousands in actual killed without any appreciable advantage to themselves.

I was given a job that occupied me incessantly until four o'clock the next morning. I had to go down with some men to secure a gap in the line about two hundred yards to our left. On the right our flank was safe, as the end of the nullah rested on the river. Arrived at the gap, I found that all the fire was coming from our left front. I therefore disposed my men along a narrow sap which ran at right angles to the position and gave a certain measure of flank protection. A few more I posted along either wall of the nullah ready for the first "wily one" who wanted to be shot.

Now the unfortunate feature of the situation was this: we were expecting any evening to be relieved, and in the swiftly-approaching darkness we could not make out whether these phantasmic masses of men manœuvring on our flank were friends or foes. Relief, it was obvious,

would not take place in the middle of an action, but it was in every way likely that reinforcements had been sent up to help us out of a difficult position.

Our consternation was not lessened when presently bullets began to hit us in the back. They came through a gap in the nullah from rifles that nobody knew anything about. There were vast multitudes of bullets that evening, all, so it seemed, directed at this vulnerable left flank of ours. They came from every direction—killing, wounding and ricochetting; doing everything, in fact, which a well-behaved bullet is expected to do according to Musketry Regulations. The confusion of fronts brought about by this cordon of fire was exasperating: nobody knew where to fire or what front to defend. For a time nobody knew where the front was.

I was shortly joined by Captain Henderson and a subaltern of his named Bulford—the latter the sort of old soldier whose chief amusement in life is hardship.

“What’s all this about?” Henderson asked.

“I don’t know,” I replied. “We seem to be getting it from the flank. You see there”—

92 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

I pointed in the darkness to where a mass of men seemed to be gathering.

"They can't be Turks?"

Turks in such numbers seemed incredible.

"I think they are."

"Have you been firing at them?"

"Yes. Here are my men. I really want more."

"Well, wait a minute. We'd better see where we are first."

He shouted with all his might to the mysterious crowd on the flank.

"Who are you?"

No reply. Then he shouted in Hindustani in case they were Indian troops. Still no reply. If they were friends they would have replied; if they were foes they would have fired. No answer at all was disquieting. Henderson made another effort, slowly punctuated.

"Who—are—you!"

"The H.L.I.," came the reply.¹

"The H.L.I.? Impossible!" Henderson exclaimed. "Why, they're in the 'Nth' Brigade, on our left. You'd better not fire for a bit. I'll just go down the nullah and reconnoitre."

¹ The reply, it is believed, of a German officer.

He moved past the sap and stalked along the nullah. Then, seeing figures ahead, he shouted to them again, and three shots in rapid succession pierced his arms.

"My God—I'm hit!" he cried, and staggering back full tilt, rushed wildly for cover in the sap. He fell heavily to the ground, cursing in the finest Irish. I sent a couple of men to dress him, and held a council of war with Bulford.

By this time an Indian infantry officer had arrived, and he put some of his men in the open in continuation of the small party I already had out. During the conference, however, some Turks wandered down the nullah again. I cannot say why—perhaps it was from sheer surprise—but although one of my men had already been hit in the head and killed the remainder seemed reluctant to return the fire.

"Fire, you . . . fools!" I shouted. "What the devil's the use of looking at them?"

They fired. Immediately, a Turk who had been cowering under cover of the nullah rushed forward and flung himself at us.

"Now you've got him!" cried Bulford, delighted. "Let him have it!"

94 ' THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

But the Turk was a particularly tough opponent. He fought madly. Reckless with pain from the wound he had received, he forced a way up the sap. There was not room for all of us in the same narrow trench, however, and in trying to escape he got jammed. In that position he was bayoneted four or five times.

I felt glad for not being a Turk that evening, even if I felt grateful for very little else. When the C.O. ordered me to link up our left with the front line of trenches I began to think myself a fool for throwing up my original job in 1914 of Special Constable—a position of renown which I held for a brief fortnight. Then I joined the Army.

However, the C.O.'s order had to be complied with. I put the men out and told them in precise terms individually—the noise made it difficult to speak to several at once—what it was they were to do. They were to do impossible things with entrenching tools in the long grass. They had not been at work for long before the fire became too hot and I had to withdraw them. One man fell dead in the act of jumping into the trench. Another

crawled in with his leg injured, and a third had to be assisted.

"All in?" I asked the last man.

So far as I could see no one was left behind.

"Yes sir," came the answer, and I went away. Passing the same spot five minutes later, however, I still saw a few men stolidly hacking at the hard soil. Somehow I felt incapable of going out there again. I raised myself above the parapet and shouted :

"Come in, you——!"

Not a movement from one of them! Still the jiff-jiff-jiff of entrenching tools in the hard earth.

I fetched them in one by one.

Shortly afterwards a heavy fire forced us back at a certain small section of the line. There was an appalling racket of firing. Men fell headlong into the nullah, blood spurted, a confusion of troops pushed and fell over each other inextricably. There were cries and groans more heartrending than can be put into words. Even now it is impossible to forget the awful pathos of men broken with pain and broken of nerve. Little attention was paid to a wretched fellow wounded in the stomach who

96 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

was shouting piteously for help. He had to be left. And it was curious to see another with the whole of the top of his head knocked off. It reminded me of the dolls you see in London shop-windows. These absurd analogies often worry you in action.

As soon as order was restored those who had had to withdraw went out again, but ammunition was running short and it was necessary to take it from the wounded. At the height of the crisis Bulford returned alone from a bombing raid he was to have carried out—the sole survivor of a party of seven. He was blazing with anger.

“Some —— fool,” he began. “Where’s the C.O.?” He pushed past livid, muttering something about “all killed.”

The noise from machine-gun fire was deafening. Occasionally it died down and a lull took place that was worse almost than fighting.

“How are they getting on in front?” I asked Summersley in one of these intervals.

“Oh, all right, I think.”

“Awkward business this,” I said, in the manner of one who has received several V.C.’s.

“It’s the limit.”

"Henderson and Young are both out of it."

"I know. So is Blackley."

"Lucky devils! Look here," I said, "can you lend me any shovels—for this barricade of ours? We'll be all night over it at this rate."

Our conversation was cut short by a display of hate. There seemed no immediate danger down the nullah, but in front there was a nasty noise. The noise increased to an uproar. Legs and arms and bodies circled about like missiles, and the same section of line gave way again—battered. But it was not yet beaten, and the men who formed it were able to go back as soon as the wounded had been placed in a safe position.

We whipped up an energetic fire after this, directed against a black column of the enemy that had evidently lost direction. At the same time the machine-gun officer began cutting into hundreds at close range. Above this din an occasional deep-sounding *boom!* thudded the ear to a dim consciousness of guns somewhere. The fighting continued. Heaven alone knew what was happening on our left. What would be the end of all this? Or did that

98 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

question really matter now? The end of what . . . ?

It was past twelve o'clock. In the nullah the wounded sat propped up against the wall waiting to be moved. During a quiet spell I paid them a visit. They had finished fighting, I reflected, and would soon be steaming down the Tigris for Basra, Bombay, or England. God! To think of sailing for England! What were they thinking of, I wondered? Pain perhaps made it impossible for them to think. Still, in a few hours they would be leaving Mesopotamia—trenches, shells, dirt, all conceivable vileness. They would be leaving all this.

At the barricade I found the Adjutant and Summersley talking together.

"Oh," the former exclaimed, "I want to see you. We're withdrawing to the trench just in rear. I'll let you know when. Summersley moves before you do." He turned to him. "He'll give you the tip, of course, and you can pass down after him."

I waited a long time for Summersley to tell

me he was moving. Hours had passed, and I knew the withdrawal must have begun. Summersley must have forgotten. Just like him to do that ! I peered into the nullah behind me. Not a soul there. I reconnoitred wherever our men were likely to be. They had all disappeared. An extraordinary silence held the air.

"It's time we were out of this," I said to the corporal with me. "Come on."

As we moved silently to the river I heard a man behind me whisper excitedly :

"There they are !" And he stopped to gaze over the parapet.

What on earth did he think he was doing ? I halted the party and spoke to him :

"What's the matter now ?"

"There they are !" he said.

"Who ?"

"The Turks."

"Rot ! Where ?"

He pointed to a line of figures moving laterally about a hundred yards ahead.

"They're not Turks ! They're our own men !" I said.

We moved on again, but after another fifty

yards my friend from the rear halted and observed a second time. I could hardly leave him there to himself and withdraw without him. And yet in defiance of all orders he still refused to come, insisting that he could see Turks.

"Don't be a fool," I said, intensely annoyed. "You're talking through your hat. It's Mr. Stepley's men you're looking at."

The unfortunate man was evidently overwrought, and in that condition which colours the imagination all too highly. I led on again and he followed, making caustic remarks to his pal "Jerry" on the immediate situation.

"You got 'old o' the wrong end o' the stick," said Jerry, disagreeing.

"*Gahn!*" said the other thoroughly disgusted. "I tell yer they're *Turks!*"

Whoever they were, they spoke unmistakable Irish when we met them.

We spent the whole of the next day hopelessly cramped in a narrow trench. The sun shone fiercely, and the wounded could only be removed with the greatest difficulty. It was

maddening here, with hunger and heat and exhaustion, and a keen sniping fire to contend with. Of course the show was over. But it didn't seem to matter whether it was over or not. We were in such an extremity of weariness and indifference that life and death seemed not to matter. The Turks could come if they liked, or they could stay where they were. Damn the Turks! You repeated the phrase for your own satisfaction.

We had made a tremendous effort; but to what purpose? We had destroyed thousands of the enemy and lost a very large number of men ourselves. Why? Kut was still unrelieved; was never likely to be relieved. These were questions that arose unasked and remained unanswered. All that remained was an unaccountable sense of disaster—disaster to yourself. It was an intuition that struck you forcibly, as if some large and disturbing factor in life, ogre-like, had stared you in the face. I imagine that if the reader could be run over by a steam-roller and emerge therefrom unscathed, he would receive much the same impression—one of dazed recovery from a meaningless catastrophe.

While the fighting was in progress and you were busily engaged in it, every moment seemed pregnant with horribly vivid feeling. It was the quintessence of adventure, this dying and smashing and terrifying of men. You had every second an appalling sense of escape that brought with it, not relief, by any means, but a kind of instantaneous denial of everything you had hitherto prized—friendship and faith, civilization and sanity, freedom and beauty—things which were at once right outside the domain of warfare, and yet (for you fought for them) intimately within it.

A futile wonderment concluded all your musings. Or perhaps it would be truer to say it made them all thoroughly *inconclusive*. It was a ghastly business, this one of war, but it had to be done. So it was no use regarding it as a ghastly business. Nevertheless, there seemed something irrefutably wrong in the death-conflict of thousands, this sickening wastage of fine and useful men. And to whom were you going to tell that? To the General Staff or to the palm-trees? As soon the one as the other! Of course, in France they were probably having a far worse time. Mark well

the fighting in France ! And trying to grasp the horror of the West, you only became more miserable about the East, and wondered hopelessly when the war was going to end. Suppose the war never ended . . . ?

CHAPTER XI

COLLAPSE

A CERTAIN amount of heavy fighting having terminated, we congratulated ourselves on still being alive (if no more), and dazedly awaited its recommencement. For that was the way of it : a fight and a rest, though the rest generally began and ended with a shovel in your hand. But our Division was to do no more fighting for a long time. And this was fortunate, for it was in no sense in fighting form.

There was another attack on Sannaiyat, I remember—vigorous and disastrous—and then a magnificent attempt on the part of the Royal Navy to run a relief ship into Kut. But this also failed, like everything else, and down rolled the curtain on the tragedy of 1916. There was then nothing more to be done. Kut-el-Amara was surrendered into Turkish hands on April 29th, closing an altogether calamitous campaign

with an altogether unnecessary piece of ignominy. Kut indeed should never have been invested, nor ever have fallen.

To say that we were depressed over its capitulation would be a queer way of placing the fact on record. For weeks we had been so uniformly dejected that no item of news, the worst, could have plunged us into deeper despair. It merely meant that in addition to the contemplation of our own dried-up and attenuated forms, we could spare a thought for the far greater misery of those going into captivity. Your mind urged itself to a picture of several thousand utterly spent and broken men trudging hopelessly to Baghdad after 143 days of siege. Some would go farther, to Aleppo, and some to the still remoter fastnesses of Asiatic Turkey—to distant, cold, unheard-of places. They could scarcely have clothes to wear now ; they could expect little food from the Turks, whose own ration was but a meagre one ; they were thoroughly exhausted in body and mind (you find it hard to realize how terrible that is) and if they fell out on the march it was doubtful if they would ever be heard of again.

106 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

Had these men ever dared to hope for release, had they ever thought with longing of homes in England and the quiet love of friends, that hope must have been finally crushed out of them as they marched from Kut into captivity.

We still held trenches under an insufferable sun somewhere in front of Sinn Banks. The heat was so intense that more comfort was to be gained from strolling about and thus creating a faint current of air than from sitting on the scorched ground. Metal articles had to be picked up with some sort of wrapping, or left alone : you could not hold them in your bare fingers. Under this heat, even the prospect of food failed of allurements. It was too hot to eat, or to indulge in anything but deep and venomous curses.

I would have you conceive the ordeal of a single day. Two hours before dawn you flung aside your blanket with a few unrepeatable phrases that included " Sandflies " and " Mesopotamia." This was the unvarying routine. At that hour the men were also beginning to rouse themselves, and the better to observe these pleasing signs you staggered out on an official visit to the trenches.

" 'Morning, sergeant. Everything all right ? " you inquired, knowing perfectly well that everything was all right.

" Yis, sir. I shall 'ave to send anither mun packin' to-day though."

" Oh ? What's the matter with him ? "

" Pains in 'is stomach, sir."

" Bad ? " "

" Pretty bud, 'e says, sir. Grawned enough last night to keep us all awake anyway ! "

Another case of cholera perhaps, or colic. They were happening every day now. Half my platoon had disappeared in this way.

At dawn, no offensive appearing imminent (if only something *would* happen !) you sent your servant to collect scrub—the sparse fuel with which breakfast had to be cooked. You always made a point of sending him on this errand, for being an unintellectual man he failed to recognize two elementary facts : (1) that wood is very useful for lighting a fire ; (2) that no one was likely to fetch it for him if he didn't do so himself. Daily, therefore, the order went forth. " And don't be all day about it ! " were your parting words to him. Miserable Starkey ! He was feeling far more

108 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

sickened with life than you, and with no kind of private philosophy to help him out. Still he was your servant (again miserable Starkey !) and servants had to do things.

By eight o'clock, with the sun striking down fiercely, your man announced that such had been the speed of his wood-cutting, that not many paces distant a plate of hot porridge awaited you—doubtless intended to alleviate the Arctic extremes of Mesopotamia ; or perhaps to provide a morning appetizer for the flies. The flies buzzed round the porridge in countless legions : it was impossible to beat them off. There seemed to be millions of them, and they crawled with a vile insistence over arm and hand and knee without the smallest compunction or respite. Their lust for jam was simply amazing. At every meal the top of the jam-tin was invisible beneath them. Before you had tasted the tea (itself an unpleasant business) five or six insects had been accidentally drowned in it, and when the meal was over the buzzing ferocity with which they attacked the remnants was sickening to behold.

The fly trouble nearly drove you mad. It is perfectly true to say that many men were near

to madness in those days, for the ordeal of heat, the extreme scarcity of water, and the presence of innumerable pests made sleep and rest for however short a time very nearly impossible.

After breakfast (the Turks never seemed to mind) you paid a visit to the other companies in the Battalion, easing your soul at each halting-place with rich and full-blooded insults at the weather and the whole of Islam. There was never any news that I can remember except once, when there came information that we were to be relieved. You considered this prospect carefully in all its bearings, and it held your attention more or less successfully for half an hour. After that you thought of it all over again, for there was nothing else to think of. In the steamy, breathless middle hours your mind was an empty chamber, impregnable behind the sentries of indifference. You became like the gentleman (I believe) of Mr. Kipling's creation, who "Sometimes sets and thinks, and sometimes just sets." You sat ; and with naught but the desert before you.

Forget not that prospect of the desert. It was one that appalled. Its bareness, its dryness, its lack of all feature, its illimitableness,

110 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

stretching in a hot thirsty waste for many a mile and many a mile again, were a speechless challenge to the eye. All the afternoon you perceived the ridges of Sinn Banks rising and falling and trembling in the mirage, like ruins in the air. By six it was getting cool again, but the day left you powerless, beaten and, as it were, reduced to pulp. You felt wrecked. The oncoming night would bring no sleep until after twelve—so went your experience. And not long after that it was time to get up for another intolerable day.

We endured this for some time before we were relieved and sent back to rest. I can see now quite clearly the rest-camp we made. To the west lay an enormous observation tower constructed of steel—and that was all. To the east lay the artillery lines and the accursed desert, and that was all. To the north lay the field ambulances and the mountains—cool, distant and inaccessible. To the south wound the Tigris—somewhere south until it reached the Gulf and wondrous places with houses, motor-cars, pavements, biscuits, and other blessings. Day by day this was the extent of our view, the fabric of our thoughts.

Much longer in this "eligible locality," as estate agents say, would have turned my head. I count it fortunate that I was obliged to go down to the Base, where a number of things helped the mind to retain its sanity.

CHAPTER XII

OVERHEARD AT BASRA

OF the few attractions existing at Basra in 1916, one was a building near Ashar Creek whose interior suggested that recently it had been overtaken by fire. Its ground floor was a mass of fallen bricks and broken bottles. You climbed up some high, wearisome stone steps into a dingy apartment resembling a veranda. One side of this overlooked the street, the other led into a couple of nondescript rooms which any visitor had the privilege of naming.

At the far end an insolent Armenian eyed you from behind a counter, and if you had ten minutes to spare you might order a drink from him. When things were at their best there was a variety of at least three to choose from—lime-juice, whisky and gin. (There was also soda-water.) But if less than ten minutes were at your disposal you could not do better than seek

other entertainment, for this was the minimum in which a drink could be expected.

Exploring the premises a little deeper you were elated at the prospect of a billiard-room and library. The sight of the library filled you with hope, but, unless you took an interest in boiler construction or veterinary surgery, it was not worth while dirtying your fingers over its volumes. On these subjects literature abounded.

Books failing, possibly you might find a sheet of note-paper for your letters home, or an envelope, but never both of these together. The man of foresight supplied his own stationery or missed the English mail.

Behind the library was another apartment, empty but for a single table and some hundreds of cobwebs. Why it should have been deserted passes comprehension, for it offered an unrivalled view of the marshes and the huge wireless station just outside. Perhaps it was haunted, though it would be a brave spirit that chose any part of Basra as a haunt. If the authorities had known the room was there I dare say it could have been turned to some account. Either the authorities knew nothing

114 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

of the room or they were incapable of thinking out a suggestion for its use.

Whether you believe it or not, this gimcrack collection of bricks and sticks of furniture, supported by numbers of promising bottles in a corner ; here and there glasses on a table, and one or two waiters without ambition—this was the Basra Club, said to make life almost worth living.

Notices on the walls stated that this was unquestionably the Basra Club. All the commissioned ranks of both services gathered here every evening to discuss the world's affairs, and, listening, you rarely thought much of the world's affairs. Listening again, you thought scarcely any better of the people who discussed them. Here, for example, was an officer expounding his war views to an audience of four. Your snobbery yielded for a moment to his incorrigible humour :

“ You get a fellow writing in the *Daily Monocle*,” he exclaims, “ about relieving Kut by aeroplane ! Relieve my boots ! Why, the other day a flying-man I know ”—he breaks off abruptly, as if aware of some deficiency.

"Boy,"¹ he shouts, "bring some drinks. Must imbibe, you know. Percy, you'll have one of course—a small whisky. And you—and you. How many's that?" He rises to make the calculation. "One—two—three—four—five. FIVE whiskies, boy; five small superior staminal pegs. Quick! Now where are my drink tickets? Damn scandal this ticket system! If the War Office—*Ah!*—*AH!*" He produces the only recognized form of exchange for drinks in Mesopotamia—a small book of tickets.

"Well, gentlemen, as I was saying," he proceeds, "until the ever-present problem of refreshment thrust itself upon us, it's all very well for these fellows to talk, but if they'd been out here as long as I have their opinions'd be different. I don't belong to the Old Comfortables sitting at home in their castles great and mansions high saying what they'd do. 'I gets my rotten pay and I does my rotten job'—thanks for a match some one—and my idea was to relieve Kut by submarine! You see?

¹ The Indian "Khitmutgar," or waiter, must not be called by his proper name of "waiter." However venerable his years, he is still called "Boy."

116 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

The very notion ! I submitted a plan to the Admiralty, but by the time it got there the beastly place had fallen ! ”

He concludes, and drains off his fifth whisky and soda.

“ The next address, gentlemen,” he adds gravely, “ will take place at 8 p.m. in the Turkish Customs House. Now who’s ready for another ? Boy ! ”

A second group talk more earnestly, and one of the dilapidated tables straddles at a perilous angle beneath the elbows of a man in the Indian Marine, who is proclaiming with emphasis :

“ If they’d *had* the troops there were no boats to send them up in—no boats, mind you, for a campaign ! ”

He repeats “ no boats ” amazedly, and with an arm outstretched, overcome by this extraordinary deficiency.

“ My dear feller,” he goes on, tapping the table with the palm of his hand, “ yer can’t fool me. I was here at the time ; I saw it all ’appen-ing—*happening*. Saw it all !—I tell yer—— ” and so on, probably for a very long time.

From the billiard-room a terrific burst of

laughter issues as some humorist repeats the same story to a different audience for the twenty-fifth time. On all sides you observe the chatter and hubbub of care-free men bent on making this hour their own.

Outside it is quieter. Quietness is fastening everywhere. A hospital ship, gliding past with wondrous stateliness, voices a penetrating note of warning as she leaves port. By now the distracting liveliness of the minor shipping on the creek has ceased. The seaworthy old dhows, served by Arab traders as hard as nails, the mahailas unloading timber and foodstuffs, all the lesser wooden host, are still. Fires burn smokily from the fo'c'sles. You detect a low conspiratorial kind of talk there among the boats, friendly but strange ; and of a sudden you realize that this is home to these people—home ! And here you are, as incongruous as a Kurdish robber in Savile Row !

Crossing the drawbridge in the direction of Ashar Barracks, you wonder how to fill in the rest of the evening. At Basra City there is the cinema, of course, but recollections of a dangerous ride along the water's edge in a prehistoric "carriage" and of the tune-

118 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

less gramophone which formed the theatre orchestra puts the idea out of mind. What else offers? In truth, nothing. On your table at camp, visible beneath layers of the day's dust, lies a copy of *The Little White Bird*—a world of romance ready to hand. But if you suppose reading to be possible after dinner, you have never known Basra in mid-summer. A thousand insects—some of them of alarming size—buzz and beat themselves around your lamp, turning full-stops into semi-colons and blotting the very words out before your eyes. That way madness lies.

You take a walk instead. Silent and asleep are all the streets and houses, their mud walls outlined against the deep sapphire sky. A veiled woman opens her stout wooden door creakily to a water-carrier, who has tinkled into existence with his asses' load from the river. (Water is carried in goatskins hereabout.) A few words as the water is emptied, the cry of a child soon hushed, footsteps departing, and silence again, deep and mystery-laden.

You marvel some dark-eyed cut-throat does not turn the corner with a knife in his hand to check in an instant your not-in-the-least prom-

ising career. These things happen—do they not?—in the East. Men disappear?

Turning back, the black waters of the creek lie still as death, glimmering only where the moon touches them through the trees. A stork flaps noisily overhead, homing for the great river, and a few frogs croak to themselves, having nothing else to do. From the depths of the palm-groves a fire flickers, but there is no sound—none but that of your own footsteps.

The upper stories in the street you are following jut out and enclose the darkness like old London, and only a thin strip of blue and a fair star or two show overhead. A score of unwashed families, thrown together in airless squalor, fill these houses. Human beings and animals shelter within them as in some Noah's Ark, and never know a better roof till they seek that of heaven.

They say there is a glamour in the East ; but it holds something very sinister as well—ignorance it may be, or a worse thing. It lies behind all the poetry and the moving colour of the world's other half, like dull rain in the purple of a cloud. And it is useless to think of it.

.

After a few days in Basra I was taken ill and sent to India. It was an astonishing thing to leave the mud and blood of Mesopotamia at last—as if you had walked into your coal cellar and found it a ball-room. Some freak of extravagance had led the Government to offer you a new world. All you had to do was to fill in the necessary forms and explore it. In these quite exceptional circumstances I thought little of the months that were over, preferring the wine of the future to the quinine of the past.

In the next chapter we open the first bottle.

CHAPTER XIII

TALKING OF INDIA

INDIA is pre-eminently a land of discoveries. These, like Bernard Shaw's plays, may be divided into two classes, the pleasant and the unpleasant. If you are an average explorer, viewing India as viewed by every one else, the first discovery made is that you have arrived in a country carefully organized on the social side to make you forget you are there. To the new-comer, the country is very much like marriage, or attempting to sleep out of doors in a thunderstorm: a supreme novelty.

Remembering this, then, and assuming you have arrived at Bombay Harbour in safety, your next step in all likelihood is a drive to Victoria Terminus; and thence to whatever military station on hill or plain Destiny may assign you. A taxi-cab takes you at remarkable speed from the quay to the railway platform,

122 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

recking nothing of street regulations or accidents. From this point you begin your travels all over again. An enormous train fitted with electric light, sleeping berths, fans and bells, rolls you on for mile upon mile, until a series of delays and a final jolt bring you up at your destination. At the station loosely-knit dirty-looking natives, with trays or baskets, press you to purchase their goods—newspapers, cigarettes, mangoes, bananas, rice and bottles of soda-water. Half a dozen impulsive coolies, dirtier still, seize your luggage through the window before the stately train has finished its journey. This is your impressive introduction to India, the foretaste of that perpetual “salaaming” which sets the Englishman on a pinnacle and the native in the mire. You perceive immediately that everything is being done for you : your province is passively to look on and feel for the small change in your pocket. You must not carry a portmanteau, turn the tap on for your bath, open a whisky bottle, hail a “tonga,”¹ find your own way out of the station or in any way prove your resourcefulness. It

* ¹ A trap.

is assumed that you are incapable of these servilities, or that, even if you were not, the tropical heat would decide you in favour of the easier course.

From this moment onward you are taught how to fill the hour with as much entertainment as it will hold. In every direction, look where you may, there is some distraction to lighten the daily burden, to drag the East a little nearer to the West. Of these you will hear presently.

If you fancy, however, that India is a demi-Paradise, whose overlord gives without taking away, there is something seriously the matter with your imagination. I realize now how grotesque were my own preconceptions of what I should find there. First impressions of countries are sometimes as misleading as first impressions of men and women ; but with this difference : that whereas you can run away from people who strike you unfavourably (or be rude to them and end the matter), you will have far to run and a great deal to pay before you can escape from India.

On the other hand, if you are in the Army

124 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

and war in an adjacent country requires your assistance, much trouble and expense will be saved you.

Not very long ago I found myself in this delectable position, and life became simplicity itself. I walked into the Mess at my regimental depot one day, and feeling dismally in my pigeon-hole for letters withdrew an official slip of paper bearing these words :

“ You are detailed to proceed to Bombay on Sunday, the 25th instant, for embarkation on H.M.T. *Bloodthirsty* to-morrow, *en route* for Mesopotamia, where you will join your unit.

“ Railway warrant may be obtained on application at Orderly Room.

“ (Signed) JOHN S. BACCHUS,
Capt. and Adjutant.

“ No. 70 Training Battalion, Dashtipore
(India).”

That is how I escaped from India. It is an essential link in the chain of this narrative, though I fear it has been prematurely forged.

You will suspect me of evading the real and somewhat painful subject-matter of this chapter. To proceed with it, therefore.

I will not detain the reader in a strange atmosphere for more than a few pages, though these will embrace a wide variety of impressions. The difficulty about life in India is that you are never quite certain whether it attracts or repels you. A few weeks' residence will familiarize you with some of its unalterable traditions. They are many, and they encompass life from the moment of rising up to the moment of lying down.

You are called very early in the morning by a dark-eyed softly-moving native servant, who stands by your bedside for some minutes exclaiming: "Sahib! *Sahib!*—*SAHIB!*—" repeatedly, in a monotonous crescendo. He knows that this process, if long enough persisted in, will eventually arouse the heavy-lidded white man. In response to a grunt he deposits tea at your bedside. Tea, or "chota hazri," as it is called, is as much a part of India as the sun or the Himalayas. Fruit, biscuits, or buttered toast usually go with it, for it is an irrefragable law that some sort of food assail your

126 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

nostrils before the first foot touches the carpet—if there is a carpet. Whether you are a subaltern (without allowances) or a full-blown General, or a human being, this feast greets the eye as punctually as Big Ben strikes the hour. It is to fortify you against the overpowering East.

It would bore the reader if I related how a subaltern fills in the hours of morning : suffice it that he fills them in. Perhaps as he leaves his bungalow an hour after sunrise he eyes the distant blue hills with appreciation, inhales the crisp morning air to find himself invigorated, unconsciously draws something from the extraordinarily sweet and refreshing country-side. The world, he muses, is a very excellent place. "This is the life!" he adds to himself, and inhales the first of his fifty cigarettes *per diem*.

Others, further removed from the parade-ground, and preferring tables and calendars to movements in fours, make pencil-marks on various pieces of paper in a paper-strewn office, tossing sheets with splendid assurance into wicker receptacles, or removing

them therefrom as circumstances demand. (This also is life in India—a considerable part of it.)

At ten o'clock the office man has occasion to go out. He has to meet the General this morning. In like manner the pauperized subaltern may be seen approaching his bungalow between parades. As they go their ways they are both brought to the same significant conclusion : " Jove ! It's hot ! "

True. Undeniably true. The sun climbs and climbs. Nearly every morning these two make this remark, though the stricter truth is not that it is hot, but that it is particularly hot. It is impossible to work in this heat. Thereupon the two gentlemen we have been observing cease from their labours, together with the majority of the station. The hours of surrender bring with them a stifling peace. Nature scarcely breathes in this blazing city of hers. Ever so gently stir the great avenues of banyan trees ; the warm air quivers ; the roads dazzle in whiteness. In every bungalow punkahs swing rhythmically on their hinges, cooling the heat-stricken Englishmen within.

128 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

Between four and five o'clock in the afternoon, after several hours' immobility, our two friends bestir themselves. So extreme was the heat that they were led to the further conclusion, despite the early morning avowal, that this was not the life at all. It was death ! They had changed into pyjamas during the afternoon to ease the oppressive burden of clothes. And now they must dress all over again. They actually submit to the ordeal of getting up twice a day !

Very well ; they get up—like caterpillars. The one (if there is any work to do) dips his dragging pen into the ink, and for the seven hundred and seventy-seventh time begins :

“Reference your Z.1234 of July 19th, enclosing Army form P.C. 49, subject : ‘ Indent for buttons,’ I am directed by the Officer Commanding Bananabad, etc. etc.”

The other (again assuming there is work to be done) twirls a cane dazedly on the parade-ground, timing the operation by his watch. Not a small part of his duties is to train recruits,

otherwise he would not be repeating in the open what he has said there already some ten thousand times. After a lengthy interval he dismisses the troops under his command, and with evident relief quickens his movements to the Club. You have seen him there before. Very likely it has occurred to you that this is not the way to work. It is not. Nobody said it was. It is what is done. Do you imagine that, after several hours' close confinement in a bungalow whose very walls seem ovens, either the mind or the body is in a condition to renew its labours? Work of some kind is occasionally performed, but you may question whether it is performed well. The climate of India is a curse to the man who would fill the day as it should be filled.

The weather, indeed, is a prolific source of evil in other directions. You are brought to this discovery in varying ways, of which I will endeavour to depict the commonest. A friend of yours, whom we will call Algernon, fails to greet you one morning with his accustomed buoyancy. As a rule he smiles affably, hails you loudly, and affirms that it is a "lovely

morning." By which he means nothing more than that the sun is shining and that he is immediately ready for breakfast. To-day he employs a different tone. He nods and mutters and falls into a silence. Curious! Very curious! You conclude there is something the matter with Algernon. He returns your tender inquiries with unprintable rebuffs; your sympathy serves only to anger him the more.

"Feeling ill, old man?" you inquire.

"Yes."

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"But you said you were feeling ill?"

"So I am; liver, I suppose. *I* don't know. It's the worst of this infernal country!"

You have encountered this frame of mind before in many of your friends in India, and you realize that the victim of it must be left alone. But what is the meaning of his pessimistic remark—if indeed it means anything? For himself, Algernon merely intended to convey the fact that he was feeling irritated, at a loss, unfit to meet his fellow-men: he was feeling generally out of condition. Further

than this he is not disposed to go. The root of his discontent lies in deeper soil, and the invalid is in no mood for digging. He hands the spade over to you.

CHAPTER XIV

STILL TALKING OF INDIA

KNOWING your friend, you attempt to reason out his misfortunes, but with results that are thoroughly inconclusive so far as India is concerned. Perhaps he has lost heavily at bridge ; yet that is no fault of India's ; perhaps he rose that morning (or several mornings) with a severe headache ; but neither is that the " infernal country's " fault. Perhaps his trousers were creased in two places at once, and it was Sunday. The blame lies in some other direction. Yet Algernon, lacking the perspective which goes with a good appetite, viewed all these trivialities as enormities. ' .

Your guesses at the truth are only partially correct, for the mischief has been brought about by quite other circumstances. One of them, as you have seen already, was the weather. The weather, Algernon opines, is

abominable, and not only abominable but entirely decisive in governing his existence. He cannot cheerfully ignore it as we do in England, and no umbrella he possesses will ever protect him from the monsoon rains.

But the defect which provokes him still more is that of his social environment. From top to bottom of India he finds that unalterable. He perceives that his circle of society is small, and not only small but amazingly selfish, as most people are who deliberately create their own exclusive coterie. He tires of their narrow outlook, of the pettiness of their desires and ambitions, the monotonous cycle in which one distraction succeeds another. If he reflects a moment he is astonished at the enormous scale on which amusement is directed. (But he doesn't reflect.)

He knows that life was not always like this ; that at one time it offered him surroundings far more congenial, if less picturesque, than those that encompass him now. Moreover, he cannot help feeling acutely, wherever he moves, the overwhelming preponderance of the native over the white man ; the ubiquity of those who speak other tongues and worship other

134 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

gods. The thought worries him sometimes, annoys him always, until in a moment of weakness he confronts himself with an extraordinary question : Why is he not living in England ?

Now he knows the answer to that question perfectly well. Because he chose to live in India. Yet periodically, as you have seen, these disturbing moods cause him to pause in doubt and turn over again the leaves of his personal history. Every ordinary man likes to ponder on what he would have done if circumstances had been different. And Algernon (though he may not care to have it announced) is an ordinary man. Comparisons being inevitable to such, he proceeds to contrast the affairs of others with his own. What are they doing over there in England ? "Dentist," answers one ; "Job in a bank," says a second ; "Stock Exchange," replies a third ; and a fourth is struggling as a solicitor.

On the top of these plebeian confessions he is satisfied that "Indian Army," or "I'm in the Civil," has a far more gratifying sound. It has. Romantic in a degree ! Nothing like it ! At once you perceive an individual who matters, for every individual matters in India.

He causes himself to matter, finding multitudes to concede his importance here where none would acknowledge it in England. (He does not say "in England," but "at home.") In the station where he is working he is recognized by everybody, achieves a certain social status, is aware that eyes are upon him, and as he reads his paper in the morning or sips his vermouth before dinner, these estimable privileges comfort him. He is known. Already the extraordinary question is half answered.

If he has a bungalow of his own, he must retain an "establishment"—that is to say a body of native servants who are periodically reviled for their services. His household staff is a complex affair. The servant who brings him his eggs in the morning is capable only of bringing him his eggs; he cannot fetch his master water as well. Another servant fulfils that office; a third posts his letters or carries messages; a fourth tends his garden, a fifth his horse, a sixth cooks his food, and so on. On such lines do the prohibitions of caste compel him to organize his domestic machinery. And doubtless the system helps him to maintain his prestige as a "sahib."

136 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

Recognizing these things (if not the danger of further comparisons) he places tennis, shooting, dances, dinner-parties, riding, billiards, cards, polo and an occasional race-meeting side by side with his work. Rather an effort to indulge all these pleasures, but otherwise the combination is admirable. Moreover, he is financially independent. In short, he did well to live in India after all. The extraordinary question is answered. There never was an extraordinary question !

Life, he muses, is a very easy thing. The years pass . . . the years pass ! So many have passed in this way that it is difficult to conceive of them passing in any other way. Until the question arose he had almost forgotten his native England, where also the sun shines sometimes, and the dew sparkles. Yet nobody can live in two places at once. Home life, he adds, is all very well, but——

There he is checked, and there we leave him, for Algernon rarely gets any farther. He stops at a peculiarly sad moment, as a man, losing himself in the desert, halts bewildered and knows not whither to turn. For it is a forlorn fact that home life, in the real sense of the word, is

non-existent in India. Melancholy but true ! You may build your nest here if you wish, but you will have to go far to feather it. The furnishing of most bungalows I have entered is cataract to the eye. Attempts at orientalizing leave you cold, and as the Westerner considers himself not quite *au fait* unless his drawing-room is littered with examples of Indian art, it is useless to become angry. I have been in only one or two houses with any æsthetic pretensions, and these belonged to men who topped the Indian honours' list, dined without fear at Viceregal Lodge, and gave an impression of paying for things in lakhs.¹ Their houses had a delightful individuality which depended rather on plain English interiors than on the harsh decoration of the East.

But of no residence high or low that I entered can I say with conviction that it was a home. It was less a defect of tables and wall-paper in the house than of temperament in the owners. Possession was naught to them ; pride of house no more theirs than pride of policemen. The imprint of personality that renders a home human was missing. You felt glum over that.

¹ A lakh—100,000 rupees.

138 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

You could not conceive the first scene of "Peter Pan" taking place here, however wide your range of imagination. No, you could not. You felt that the domestic kingdom lay distantly outside in a more worldly, less beautiful atmosphere. In this place the hearth never glowed : it was cold.

Now there is one unalterable fact to account for this. It is what one may call the permanent impermanence of Indian life. For if the climate cannot oust you from your habitation, very surely the Government can. Protest if you will—you may go on protesting. One or other of these autocrats issues the order, and it is for you to obey, forgetting the blow in the hundred and one social relaxations that are there for the purpose.

Broadly speaking, however, and strange as it may seem, English people in India do not worry themselves about these things, if ever they give them a thought. Occasionally the inefficiency of a native servant, or the noisy observance of caste rites round the corner, with its hideous trumpeting and fanaticism, cause them serious shakings of the head, inward fears that the country is an uncivilized country. And if by

this they mean that in India you must sacrifice your literature, your drama, your song, and your fine arts generally—all the more delicate flowers of progress—then indeed they are right. But in India no Englishman cares a pinprick about that. When he declaims about non-civilization he is only voicing the general intolerance, and frequently the ignorance, of other Englishmen. He is venting his ire on the native. And this is absurd, for the first impulse of the Western mind is to collapse under the strain of understanding him. His religion is incomprehensible to the white man, whose standards of life and conduct are utterly different. He forgets that to dismiss the creed of the native is to have done with India once for all. Nevertheless, he is trying hard to dismiss it all the time. Moreover, he is forgetting other important things in this country of “barbarians”: namely, that there are excellent means of communication in the shape of railways, that there are many fine and well-built cities within whose walls life and property are safe, and finally that there is a Government which is capable of ruling, and which, indeed, is constantly ruling him.

But, as I have attempted to point out, the majority of visitors from West to East came for quite other reasons than to examine social problems. They came as romanticists and small-sized adventurers. They came not with any ambition to learn, or to create, or to progress, or to strive nobly towards anything, but chiefly to cut large slices from the social cake. Whence it follows that if you enjoy tea-cups (as we all do) and euphemisms and scandal (as some of us do not) you will enjoy a great deal of India. Indeed, it can be recommended as the school for scandal. You need have no anxiety about intellectual attainments : it is possible to get on quite as well without as with them. But, whatever qualities you have or lack, it is criminal not to be sociable. The man who refuses to join the club is not required : he has some disease. There is only one cure for it, and that is for him to lose his independence as an individual as soon as possible, and model himself in the prevailing fashion.

As there are not many Englishwomen in India compared with the number of men, it is not strange that the former should have many

courtiers—a Spenser or a Drake or a Raleigh to every queen. Unfortunately, there is a less gallant side to the question than you might suppose. In this immense colony, freedom of speech and freedom of action are altogether greater. You cannot dwell long in India without being struck by that fact. To explain it you must remember that India is in reality a man's country, and in the places they have made for themselves men are bold creatures, both in speech and in act. They leave an atmosphere of audacity and assertiveness behind them which becomes infectious with the adored sex.

As a consequence, the women-folk move in a circle not only masculine, but too often basely masculine. And should you be surprised at this, I can only reply that the Army, which constitutes more than half the life of India, is not a community lending itself to homely refinements or cultured modes of expression. Its ways are rough and hard to tread. Its ways are the antithesis of all that is gentle and gracious and womanly. But for all that you cannot exclude women from the life of India. No, you cannot. As with life generally, there comes the eternal compromise. If

women are to be there they must sacrifice some of their special attributes, exchanging them, as is the fashion nowadays, for those of the men. And this is precisely what they do. I remember once hearing a lady refer to her husband's commanding officer as "our C.O.," and I resolved immediately that, if ever my imaginary wife spoke to me in similar terms, I would throw her one last cold glance, and flee to the nearest monastery. But possibly I expect too much of wives.

You may complain that this is a sad picture ; that, on the contrary, I expect too much of India. With all possible courtesy, I must disagree. One thing only is to be deplored of India : that it cannot be transferred to some quarter of the Atlantic Ocean. But for this it is a magnificent country—much finer, in fact, than the people in it. Clothed in her exquisite white robe of the North or her green beauty of the South, she shames the tatters of humanity that trailed over five thousand miles to see her. All who have crossed the plains or beheld the Himalayas must have felt that there is a grandeur here overwhelming in its loveliness. You become aware then that the thousand

desperate motives and struggles of mankind are as naught to this one quiet, stupendous scene.

That is the feeling that grips you when it is time to leave India, and the scents of morning, the brilliance of day, and the colour of evening are but a thought. You can recall nothing so wonderful as this in England, whose beauty is of a type apart, as the miniature to the full-length portrait. You are torn between the fairness of the West and the deep magic of the East.

Yet the latter is a foreign soil to you ; it is not the land of your fathers. Never can you be at one with those scores of millions of Indians whom ages of bitter history have not yet made into a nation. Never can you be at home here, although that is a consideration which, sensibly enough, you have resolved to forget. Indeed, it is one which you must forget.

But if this land of a thousand peaks can stir your heart at all, if this garden can speak to you of its beauty, if the cities and mosques gleaming white on the plains or standing like toys on the mountain-side can startle you in wonder for a moment, then it will not be untruthful to

144 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

say : In the casual light of day India had little to show that was either noble or inspiring ; but afterwards, through the mists of memory, a picture emerges brilliant in colouring, vast of scene, and, in imagination, unforgettable.

CHAPTER XV

THE CITY OF FASCINATION

BOMBAY has ever been a magic name with me, like Peter Pan's Never Never Land, or indeed any kingdom of colour and dancing lights and surprising afternoons. Always I filled in the tapestry of Bombay with great elephants, figures of princes and gay Eastern peoples. Unfortunately this palace of fancy was not built on the soundest foundations and I have since had to pull part of it down. Ultimately I was obliged to put up another building altogether. But if the new dwelling is less gorgeous, it still gleams in the sunlight sometimes and splendid colours flash from its opal-gemmed windows.

I found there were two ways of approaching India—one (the more thrilling) was from a theatre of war; the other (and less usual) was from Putney or Hampstead, or any locality where guns and madness are not. In any case

146 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

the means of approach were of little consequence : the real adventure was in arriving there.

There was something entirely satisfying about Bombay, like opening a bottle of Chartreuse or receiving a cheque. Here the Englishman had planted his foot and planted it firmly, though the fascination of the city lay less in this fact than in a commingling of the familiar West with the unfamiliar East. Such a combination, after months of barbarous living, was an immediate attraction to you, a perfectly novel experience that made the week-day seem far more like a week-end. Everything flourished and—excepting the subaltern—every man. All the subaltern had to do was to sign cheques, which he did with a facile and worldly hand. I will invite you to a closer scrutiny of this bland financier later on. For the present I am concerned with Bombay alone.

The city is by no means entirely Europeanized. It produces the effect of trying to be so and just failing. You have fine wide streets and large prosperous shops, with torrents of rain sluicing the whole to cleanliness. By day commerce animates the place electrically in a

thousand directions. The hotels are full ; theatres, cinemas and restaurants swarm with visitors, and money flows in placid unrestriction.

To one whose expenditure has been limited for some time to candles and soap and undistinguished khaki shirts all this is eminently desirable. You dive into this shop and you are buried in that, emerging each time followed by a little black figure whose duty it is to place your parcels in the waiting gharry.¹ From the first the tradesman places himself under immense obligations to you. You begin to think that at some time or other you must have saved his life ; but rest assured these refinements go down on the bill, together with the paper and string. Bombay can be very charming when it chooses, but apparently it cannot be both charming and cheap—cheap, that is, in the financial and unromantic sense. But this characteristic of big cities is one you can easily forget. There's more than mere sealing-wax in the pulsing markets of Bombay.

You perceive a huge community well housed and well provided for. There are mansions

¹ Gharry—an open carriage of great antiquity.

148 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

that stand stately on Malabar Hill ; churches, museums, railway-stations and business houses that London might fitly accommodate. There are gardens fronting the sea, comfortable clubs, vast hotels (though it is true they are little more than vast). There are sports grounds, green parks and excellent hospitals. Trams dingle from one end of the city to the other, and the mortality from taxi-cabs is impressive. Further afield you catch wide views across the sea where the mainland flings out an arm to protect this vast treasure of hers.

It is sad that Bombay has no real seaboard, but only the grave, great harbour beyond. This is where, ton upon ton, the produce of India is piled in the holds of our ships and the deep music of the siren floats across the bay. From a window you can watch this blue panorama with untiring eyes, and if there is a soul in you, let it thrill for a moment to the power of a great nation, for here it is.

I hinted of that glamour which is called the East. Night in Bombay will convey something of its message, when the city gathers its dignity in soft outlines against a sapphire heaven, and heaven itself trembles with stars.

I would not give the impression, however, that Bombay is all silver and jade. There is rougher artistry round the corner. Cramped, tumble-down, ill-ventilated houses creak for room in the back streets, and Dignity is made to walk with bent head along these highways. An immense amount of household rubbish—the treasure of the humble—is here accumulated. There is a loud town-crying from the sellers of native foods and small stores; idlers and beggars fill the doorways and block the traffic. You might be in Aldgate or Islington, except that this is the one quarter that savours indubitably of the East. It is the native quarter. The turban and the caste-mark prevail.

Return now to the precincts of Hornby Road—Bombay's Regent Street. Thence, after the manner of the great, direct your taxi-driver to take you to the Taj Mahal Hotel. Not that this is by any means a place of rest. If you are studying ethics or the causes of the war, there is only one corridor in the mileage of them to take: that which leads to your own room. Peace is not else obtainable. If, on the other hand, you are interested in soldiers and the curiously pompous civil side, ascend to the

lounge, and take one of the comfortable white wicker chairs standing under the fans: Summon one of the stony-eyed waiters, and order cold drinks. Fill a pipe, lean back ; place an ankle on one knee, and, pausing a moment to breathe the perfumed air of leisure, contemplate the scene before you.

It possesses something of the vulgar, something of the humorous, and a larger something of India. Those who have never been to Bombay should rid themselves of the idea that it is only the élite that sustain the life of the hotels there. Not at all. As in the West so in the East. All sorts and conditions meet here, and create their own blameless and satisfactory world. The figures in khaki, many fresh from home, move with purpose and alacrity. No such energy, however, marks the Orientalized civilian, accustomed to living smoothly and with circumspection. Leisure and cigars accompany his movements. They are not real cigars either : they are palpably plebeian cheroots. Except that I prefer a pipe, my emoluments as a New Army Officer would have kept me in boxes of them. These men cling to the cheroot as if it added something

THE CITY OF FASCINATION 151

special to their status, whereas it only standardizes them to the recognized Indian pattern. Possibly that languid air of theirs has something to do with wealth and position. Of course, if wealth and position appeal to them.

The profusion of bottles on the tables and the constant cry for their replenishment is a thing to marvel at. The women assist this prodigality—to put it delicately—in the consumption of Caledonian blends. This is chilling. The bearing of women altogether in the hotels of Bombay is not womanly : it is garish and deplorable. It is characterized by loud display and loud conversation ; for there is a certain class of woman whose vanity, when it cannot be sustained by beauty, can easily be satisfied by publicity. If it please them to parade and marshal themselves, however, I am the last one to cancel their “ operation orders.” “ There is not so much happiness in the world,” said a present-day writer, “ that we are justified in cutting any of it short.” Agreed. There is not.

But the women are in the minority here. They bear but a small proportion to the large number of British and Indian Army officers

whose uniforms greet the eye wherever it roams. You cannot escape them. There they sit—pipes and tongues a-wag—all very intent on making the best of a bad war.

Some of these men will rule India one day. They therefore have an importance of their own—and a very peculiar one. India, indeed, is a country of many peculiarities ; and perhaps the biggest of them all is the Englishman there. Your first impression is not so much one of a new country as of an entirely new Englishman. I could admire the man who flashed his sword from Bengal to Sind and proclaimed in a towering voice : “ Here I am, and here I stay.” I could admire the man who hammered his steel out in the West and laid it in rails to the heart of the jungle. I could admire the builder of bridges ; the patient carpenter in mountains ; I could admire the maker of cities, harbours and long white roads. These were figures of men, and they have left a splendid heritage. But if their successors think of anything at all beyond whisky and travelling allowance, it is certainly not gratitude that they think of. Their garden has been made, let them pluck the flowers : their book has been written, let them

read and forget it ; their sea has been charted, let them boast its perils.

This is not alone the attitude of the spirited adventurer who left home but yesterday, though his it is in the main. The man who has attained the high-water mark of bronzed or malarial perfection oft-times displays the same feeling. He sits down hard in this amazing East and rises with alacrity for cushions. Finding none, he peregrinates in discomfort for twenty years, and retires on a pension. He finds India not very much more interesting, in its wider sense, than my discarded bowler hat or an empty beer-bottle. Indeed, he probably finds the latter more interesting, for it is at all events invested with an atmosphere of sentiment.

But, except in the fitting of his riding-boots and the daily unction of brilliantine, the white man scarcely perceives his own surprising characteristics.

CHAPTER XVI

DIVERSIONS OF THE DESERT

RETURNING again to Mesopotamia was as unpleasant as going to business on Sunday. Nevertheless it was better to be of use in Mesopotamia than useless in India. Indeed, looking back on those days, I would with one exception give any single year of my wildly romantic career in exchange for them. History was made then ; you yourself felt historic, like Napoleon or the Big Four.

I remained in Iraq for six months, after which I returned to India to recover. For very many this was the normal procedure. Those who endured not months but years of Mesopotamia without a break were considered prodigies of bodily fitness. After nine months in India I went back a third time—paradoxically in even better spirits than before.

It would be difficult to explain why I was so glad to go back ; the strange fact remains that

I was. Explanations would be tedious, and in any case they are immaterial to the present story. The important fact for the writer was that the year 1917 saw the bagging of Baghdad—an event which might have had disastrous effects on his career. Every one who went to Mesopotamia in that year felt fairly certain (but always uncertain) that an attempt on this scale would be made.

As a fact, first Kut, then Baghdad, and finally the ancient town of Samarra (a former site of Baghdad) fell into British hands. It was thus a period of exceptional interest; it was written about at length in the world's newspapers; Generals and Cabinet Ministers discussed it. Eventually the public knew where Mesopotamia was on the map.

Let me add it was not because I was fond of fighting that I left for the Gulf again. No suggestion could be more absurd or farther removed from the truth. I had orders to return in the ordinary course of things, and at that time they were more in the nature of a birthday present than anything the Army had yet offered me.

India was getting on my nerves.

156 THE BAGGING 'OF BAGHDAD

In December, 1916, operations in front of Kut were resumed after what was lightly alluded to as "careful preparation." During the month in question my Regiment was distributed over a section of the Lines of Communication extending from Shaik Saad to Sinn Banks. At Shaik Saad supplies were unloaded from the P. boats, and a rickety railway, far more uncertain than the old horse-trams of London, carried them to within a few miles of the firing-line. It was this railway which the Regiment was mainly engaged in protecting, assisted by complicated wire entanglements and observation posts. Attached to the barbed wire were cunning devices in the shape of bomb-traps and trip-rifles, so that any person approaching on an unauthorized visit was neatly and easily blown to pieces.

On these terms life was fairly attractive, though there was that perpetual undercurrent of apprehension to contend with. You felt that it was impossible to look on at the war like this for long. Unless there were something more important to do, why not return to India at once, or to a better place? You had heard of better places.

Nearly every day drafts marched up—infantry, cavalry and artillery—in splendid physical condition, and you thought to yourself : “ Some of these men will be dead in a few days, or wounded ; and yet each one fancies the worst will not happen to him, or, unable to fancy that, refuses to contemplate the matter at all.” And this reflection was unavoidable to any thinking person, for it was the truth. It was the truth that some of these free and healthy men were condemned, as it were, even at the height of their optimism. Some of them must die ! Amazing as it may seem, the only comfort to be drawn from this inference was that possibly the same fate might be yours. That alone seemed to justify the attitude. Any day you might get orders for the firing-line, and then. . . . The same gaunt figure of Death stood impatiently at the door of consciousness, compelling you to give admittance.

You may remark that this was a very morbid way of viewing life. So it was. Undoubtedly. Necessarily. But it was no more avoidable than that instinct which at seventy informs a man that his time has come. It was involuntary. It was no more justifiable to believe you were

*No, he was a
sound healthy man*

158 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

going to survive than to believe you were going to die. Death is often a fascinating speculation ; always a brave one. And :

He who has once been happy is for aye
Out of destruction's reach. His fortune then
Holds nothing secret ; and Eternity,
Which is a mystery to other men,
Has like a woman given him its joy.
Time is his conquest. Life, if it should fret,
Has paid him tribute. He can bear to die,
He who has once been happy !¹

Something akin to this, if less splendid in conception, is part of your war philosophy. Something akin to this adds the touch of iridescent colour to the cold puddle of war.

The heavy thud of guns began at seven o'clock one morning and continued till half-past ten. The drama had begun, and instantly your thoughts were switched on to the innumerable actors for whom the rise of the curtain meant so much. Perhaps when the first shell sang over the Turkish lines there was laughter among the enemy. They were brave men and brilliant fighters. For months they

¹ From "The Poetry of Wilfrid Blunt," London. William Heinemann.

had been expecting this ; their guns were in position ; they had but to wait our coming to cut us down. Nothing could have been simpler. Last year, thought they, what hopeless blunders the enemy had made ! What idiotic, unpardonable, grotesque blunders ! With such assurance spake the Turk, and regarded far more affectionately and with better reason than ourselves the cold old rifle on the parapet.

What were our own men thinking ? Some of them, I doubt not, were speculating as to the probable extent of the bread ration that evening—unless it were biscuits. Others were pondering in a wild, weary sort of way how they would be received when all this was over. Paragraphs in the newspapers said—but they had read similar paragraphs last year. Some again were singing without thinking ; they were sick with thinking. And still others were enrapt in imaginings that were intensely their own, and must remain their own for ever.

A few days later the wounded came down. They were jolted along the ridiculous railway to Twin Canals, which was a station on the Blockhouse Line.¹ It must have been agony

¹ Blockhouse Line—a chain of defended redoubts.

160 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

to some of them, but here they were given food, something hot and delicious to drink, and for those who were but slightly hurt this flying from the labour of the battlefield was a joyous holiday. Their tunics and shirts were torn ; their feet frozen in their boots ; their bandaged limbs stiff with immobility ; their faces coated with mud ; it was painful to move about or to be moved. But for a few weeks sleep and food were theirs—and baths ! Feeling sank to oceanic depths there !

If you are proud, of course, you will have nothing but contempt for these superficial emotions. (I have heard them called superficial.) If you are human you will comprehend their pathos ; if you are imaginative you will want immediately to begin fighting, or to rush away to some happier world.

Down came the wounded and up went the rations, the fuel for the cook-houses, the tinned milk, barbed wire, rockets, picks, shovels and shells ; the butter, the bacon and the jam ; and occasionally (as if by accident) the mail. This was the only feature on earth of any permanent

interest to you. Far above this vacant earth of yours, at an altitude of some two to three thousand feet, an observer's balloon hung at a lop-sided angle in the sky. Dawn every day saw it wobbling and bouncing against nothing to its height, and sunset as regularly watched its descent again. It was an expensive balloon evidently, or it would be hard to understand why it was not left anchored in the sky overnight, hazardous though that might be. Possibly the occupants had invitations to dinner down below. At all events, it rose and fell with such precision that I was able to tell the time by it. The date I could calculate almost to a day from the postmark on my mother's weekly letters.

Occasionally you snatched a journey into Twin Canals from the group of blockhouses you commanded. At Twin Canals there was a gramophone, an officers' mess, and a possibility of other people to talk to besides yourself. There was the mild excitement of returning on top of a truck, and jumping off from a considerable height without "waiting till the train stopped." (Only a Colonel, or a Major, by threats, could stop the train between stations.)

Altogether it was a diverting life on Lines of Communication.

At Company Headquarters, consisting of a small camp, there was another and still finer gramophone offering the combined talent of Mark Hambourg and Wilkie Bard. This instrument was played recklessly and at all speeds till a late hour of the night. We sat in heavy British Warmes at mess, for it was bitterly cold in the evenings ; and, after the stew and the pine-apple, we listened to Captain Drinkwell telling his favourite and least reproducible yarns. Always there was tremendous laughter and a noise of bottles, but if there were no bottles there was seldom any laughter. Whenever a silence fell it was immediately rectified by the gramophone, which had the effect, as it were, of drawing the company into conversation. The happiest way to spend the evening was to listen to the gramophone and Drinkwell simultaneously—absorbing the best of each. My company commander was afflicted with a perpetual hoarseness, and this unfortunately communicated itself to our best records. You could thus choose between Tchaikowsky and a rasping overture, or Drinkwell croaking out his

contempt for modern artillery. Either was well worth listening to, though the composer was at a disadvantage for those who could not appreciate good music.

It was after one of these late nights that the great news came. We had exhausted ourselves in talk and laughter, though a certain class of music (less, I fear, the food of love than of foolery) continued unabated. Just as the second in command, a trifle excited and pleased with himself, was announcing his intention of retiring, a message came through from the Adjutant.

"What the——!" the second in command exclaimed, glancing at his watch. It was past twelve—hardly an hour to expect any but important messages.

"*You're* for it!" said he, turning to me and attempting to reduce his mirth to the correct level of gravity.

"For what?" I asked, with thoughts of the Orderly Room.

"You've got to report to the Post Commandant at Sinn Banks by noon to-morrow," he said. "You're attached to the Peter-shires—you, and four other poor devils."

164 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

He named the selected four. There was Littleford, Lane-Monckton, Blundell and Cardley. To-morrow or the next day, therefore, we should be in the firing-line. An instantaneous thrill for nothing! Innumerable thrills to follow!

Ten hours later, having packed up sixty pounds of kit to look like forty, we started off, with the morning air gloriously fresh and the far-off mountains superbly coloured.

Before very long, I thought, we might be using the rickety railway again.

CHAPTER XVII

TACTICS AND CAFÉ AU LAIT

THE tactics which led to the recapture of Kut were simple in the extreme.

It is not necessary to remind the reader that, when operations reopened, our position at Sannaiyat still remained as stationary as ever. At Sinn Banks, on the other side of the river, we had occupied the redoubts of Dujailah and Sinn Abtar, which the Turks had stupidly abandoned the previous summer. They now held positions slightly east of the River Hai, and between their outposts and ours there lay a neutral zone, much patrolled and reconnoitred by both sides.

Our attitude at Sannaiyat may be likened to that of the small urchin attempting to get past the big policeman. It was very nearly impossible. Without guile it was quite impossible. Following the urchin, therefore, we resorted to stratagem, hitting out at the policeman when-

ever occasion offered. His truncheon, though accurate, was a small one, and primarily our object was to induce him to pull it out. That is where we differed from the urchin.

General Maude decided that if astute manœuvring could achieve anything, it could achieve the capture of Kut. The enemy, on the other hand, was very wide awake. He had been misled once before at the extraordinary battle of Shaiba (south-west of Basra) in 1915, where, mistaking our transport for guns, he took to his heels panic-stricken, and never appreciated the joke.

Now the Army Commander's intentions were these : to make a big demonstration at Sannaiyat, with the object of drawing troops away from the neighbourhood of Shumran and Dahra. (Please look at the map, or be good enough to skip this page.) These localities were situated beyond Kut, or west of it, so that any removal of troops therefrom would leave this portion of the river undefended, or at all events but lightly held. At the same time he decided to push troops up the right bank of the Tigris past the Shatt-el-Hai, and that deep loop in the river, which—whether you look at the

map or not—makes Kut-el-Amara a peninsula. Having obtained this valuable coil of the river without suspicion, he delivered his master-stroke. You will see what that was in a moment.

By the middle of February, although we had made no impression on Sannaiyat beyond a few dents in the ground from our batteries, our men on the other side of the Tigris had cleared the river west of Kut to a depth of some two and a half miles. These operations, however, the Turk never regarded seriously, but merely as a simple piece of bluff.

We patted ourselves on the back and proceeded. It seemed possible that the enemy was completely nonplussed; uncertain in his own mind which to regard as the major operation—the advance from Sinn Banks to Shumran or the tremendous awakening at Sannaiyat. But when the moment came for a decision the error he made was a fatal one. He gracefully placed his head on the block for General Maude to chop off. Forthwith the Army Commander dealt the blow, and held the unpleasant prize in his hands.

To return to events as they actually happened, however. As soon as the Turks realized

that the Sannaiyat position was threatened, they attempted to avert disaster by rushing masses of men down from Dahra barracks. But by so doing they invited something worse. It was as we hoped. For at the same time, with a coolness that was magnificent, our men crossed the Tigris at Shumran and cut the reinforced enemy off. It was a brilliant piece of work. The main enemy force suddenly found itself trapped, flung into confusion—an army behind it and an army in front of it. With this catastrophe confronting him the Turk might have known there was nothing further to be done. And of all things—to his credit be it said—it was hardest to convince him that he was done for.

A few of the hemmed-in army at Sannaiyat endeavoured to escape through the Suwaikiyah Marsh to the Persian foot-hills. Scarcely anybody knew—or even wondered—what became of them. The important thing was they were no longer opposed to us—so many the less to kill. The majority of them, of course, were captured, and the remnants struggled in pathetic haste for Baghdad and the fiery plains beyond.

For the five of us marching up as reinforcements these events were part of a hidden destiny. We found ourselves compelled to acknowledge that the immediate future might be fraught with elaborate discomfort, if not positive danger. In the meantime the thing to do was to be as cheerful and as self-possessed as possible.

"Heaven help the Turk now!" Lane-Monckton exclaimed as we plodded along.

And we all laughed.

"If any of those swine come for me——" Cardley muttered fearfully.

And we all laughed.

"I hope you realize," put in Littleford, "that the future of the Near East is dependent on our efforts."

And we all laughed.

"The object of infantry in attack," I quoted severely, "is to come to close quarters as quickly as possible, so as to be able to use the bayonet."

And again we all laughed—an unusual reception for my jokes.

The plain fact of the matter was, the four of us "had the wind up." We were nervous.

170 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

Not one of us intimated this immense secret to the other, for it was unnecessary. Each already knew it. As wise to tell the butcher that you have come to him for meat, or the doctor for medicine.

When a famous General gave it as his opinion that there were very few soldiers who were absolutely fearless, he was probably right, but I suspect he was addressing himself to a civilian. The soldier knows that before he can be told ; he knows it constantly ; his mind is pathetically full of it, his nerves ever straining against it. It is not, after all, an easy thing to die cheerfully. And perhaps the most amazing thing of all is that any man should be placed in such a position that this may for a short time become the main object of his existence. You endeavoured to grasp this enormity with composure, only to find that there was a reverse side to the picture.

How would it be to live cheerfully for a period instead? Finding it quite impossible to answer this question you had to turn the picture over to its original side again, and be satisfied.

The trenches we came to were like any other trenches. Hence, beyond referring the reader

to the newspapers of 1914 to 1918, it is unnecessary to describe them. At the time of our arrival the Brigade was in reserve, and a light bombardment was in progress to cut the enemy's wire. I remember what a slow, intermittent, polite affair it was—each shell a gentle reminder of more to come. We were made very welcome, of course, but it was the sort of welcome you would extend to a new Bradshaw, having discarded the old one.

"We had a pretty rotten show the day before yesterday," my company commander said, "I must show you how the position stands from the map."

"Thanks," I replied. "You lost a lot of men, I suppose?" At the moment the fatuity of this deduction did not strike me.

"Yes—and officers. It's extraordinary the officers we lose," he said, enumerating them and at the same time looking at the air with intense mystery in his eyes. "Three hundred and fifty men and fourteen officers. We want you people badly now."

"I expect so," I agreed, and swallowed the details he outlined of the work in hand. We pored over a Tigris Corps map for a while with

severe intelligence, and, for my part, immediate concurrence in all that was said. The map was a tangle of squares and snaky lines and bewildering numbers, sufficient to nauseate the most seaworthy, or perhaps I should say map-worthy. I nevertheless stated my entire comprehension of the situation and of the tactics to be employed.

My company commander, Captain Dales, was a man not only of fine physique, but of fine intellect. He was brave, and had fought consistently well, and both in the clearness of his ideas and the thoroughness of his methods he expressed confidence. Unfortunately he had a theory for everything, and, what was worse, a passion for carrying out each one as it occurred to him. Afterwards I had good reason to know what this thoroughness of his meant, but for the moment it only concerned a matter of putting the men through some squad drill. "They want pulling together," he said.

Looking round, this was at once obvious. I had never seen men in such a condition of nervous apprehension; so stupefied with oppression and the sensations of battle. It was pitiful; it was sickening.

There was one officer in the battalion, however, who seemed quite untouched by this morbid atmosphere. Bombardments never worried him ; the weather affected him not ; death could not appal him ; the toil of the trenches left him unshaken ; inconsequence perpetually gave him voice, and especially was this noticeable when he was preparing for dangerous work. Only in moments of extraordinary self-revelation was it possible to penetrate this happy disguise of his. He had the entirely unaffected name of Smith, and as he belonged to my company I was introduced to him the same evening. He apologized for the condition of his dug-out, which he told me was not a drawing-room ; he found me a servant, pressed me to dinner, and was altogether the affable host. It was baffling to have so charming a reception—incongruous—as if a friend of yours from the Stone Age had insisted on wearing a silk hat.

He described the recent battle with tremendous enjoyment :

“ It was wonderful, you know,” he said, “ like a cinematograph show. You could see the men going on and on, bang through the

smoke and shrapnel as if nothing was there. It was marvellous. Then there was a sudden pause, you heard the 'tinny' rattle of Turkish machine-guns, and a lot of men went down. You don't know Cunningham, do you? He's quite a young chap, and he came back—crying, crying bitterly. He said, 'Smith—Smith—look! I've lost a hand!' It was ghastly; but what could I say to him?

"I went up with a salvage party afterwards, at night, and it was terrible to see these men lying there—they looked so fine in the moonlight. Have you seen them like that?" He spoke with complete detachment, as though he were referring to photographs. "Their faces and their outstretched arms—somehow they were fascinating, horribly fascinating, if you can understand me."

I was astounded. But in another moment my friend was talking in the blithest manner of his sister, from whom he had just received a letter.

"What does she say?" I asked.

"Oh—you'd laugh if you knew. She's just bought a new hat. Isn't it absurd!" He laughed delightedly at this brilliant joke.

"Before the war," he continued, "I used to buy my sister's hats myself. I used to trim them too. I'm quite good at that. I occasionally went up to town to that shop in Regent Street—what's the name of it?"

"Madame Louise," I answered, charging nothing for the advertisement.

"That's it. At the corner. They didn't dare turn me out because I knew too much about it. I——"

There was an interruption, and an orderly, who had become famous for his exploits, appeared at the entrance to the dug-out.

"The C.O. wants to see all officers, sir," he announced bluntly, and disappeared.

"That's done it," I said. "We'll have to talk out this matter of hats afterwards. Are you coming?"

I groped to the exit.

"Yes. Won't you take a coat?" Smith said.

"You'll be cold."

I took a coat while Smith gave orders for the morning.

"What time d'you want calling?" he inquired.

"Oh, any old time," I said.

176 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

“ All right. Six o'clock, then. And Peters,” he added, turning to his servant, “ don't forget the *café au lait* in the morning, will you—*hot*, you know ! ”

CHAPTER XVIII

BAG AND BAGGAGE

IT is futile to attempt to set down on paper the effect of watching an intense bombardment. It is at once the most awful and the most exhilarating of sensations, awakening feelings in you both of strength and of impotence. You must see guns in action to realize their power, their life, their very magnificence.

Flash after flash leapt like lightning from our batteries in a great crescent of fire. This exhibition was one of the numerous preliminaries to attack which resulted in our gaining that portion of the river already referred to—the Shumran Bend. Eventually the Turks found themselves with no alternative but to back across the river or be captured. If they chose the former course they had first to find the boats; but there were no boats. To swim across might be good exercise, but it might result in pneumonia. There could be no sense or valour in swimming

178 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

across, especially as they could scarcely hope to reach the other side with so powerful a current to fight against. In these circumstances, the Turks resolved on the simpler manœuvre of surrender, and when we launched our attack some two thousand gave themselves up *en masse*. This was the beginning of their demoralization, the settling of their fate. The crescent and the star—emblem of the Turkish nation—had ominously sundered, and when at night this spectacle repeated itself in the sky, the moon parting from a planet conspicuously near it, we foretold evil days for the enemy. As on his flag, so in the heavens, the moon and the star should be inseparable.

The Petershires took a considerable part in the operations now in progress. We captured the ground from which the *coup de grâce* was to be made, keeping a particularly vigilant eye on the Turk's movements across the river. These minor adventures cost us the lives of three officers whom we could ill afford to lose—useful and esteemed men. One of them was my friend Smith, who was knocked out by a "stray," though taking no actual part in the show. Another was leading his company into

action when he received a bullet through the mouth, and the medical officer, in a splendid but fruitless effort to save him, was himself shot through the head. This was in February. In April the doctor was to have had an opportunity of going home. Well do I remember the jests he made over that prospect, for he was a man of singular humour and charm.

These events were followed by a thunderstorm of extraordinary violence, and at its height my company was ordered up to hold the ground just gained. The hailstones—some of them of a size to rejoice a bored meteorologist—rattled cheerfully on our topees, and a heavy mist made it difficult for us to see where we were going. We sank nearly to our knees in water. Not that there was anything either novel or alarming in this : it was merely Mesopotamian. The men, indeed, with characteristic delight over nothing, regarded the drenching as an immense joke, and sang songs to the accompaniment of squelching boots.

The night which followed, however, was one of unqualified misery. Towards twelve o'clock the rain reduced itself to a drizzle, and although it was useless to dig in water so deep—

180 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

whether for comfort or defence—we were compelled to do something to keep ourselves warm. So at two o'clock we began digging furiously, as if the effort would magically dispel all the heavy melancholy of the recent fighting.

Meantime the Tigris swelled to full flood and the point where we had to cross was now some six hundred yards wide. Picture if you can the difficulty of throwing a pontoon bridge across so swift and malicious a river as the Tigris. Quite apart from the initial difficulty of launching the pontoons, a single enemy machine-gun plied on the first boats to go over would spell ruin to the whole enterprise. The thing must be done immediately, while the weather lasted and the Turk was innocent.

We waited and waited. Several fine days passed and still no orders came. We waited and waited again. We knew, of course, that not a thousand yards away a Regular battalion, specially singled out for its trustworthiness, was concentrated in readiness to "go over." They spelt discipline with a gigantic D, and if ordered to do so could doubtless be depended upon to attack the moon.

.

' One morning a dim thunder rolled across from below Kut. It must have been at least twelve miles away.

"What on earth's that?" I asked the sergeant-major. "Listen!"

We both listened.

"Sounds like guns, don't it?" said the Warrant Officer in a moment of illumination. He was a dear old man off the Reserve, and although gifted with an incessant flow of speech, his ideas suffered much from antiquity and memories of the South African War.

"It must be at Sannaiyat," I conjectured, "They're trying to break through."

"They won't get through there in a month o' Sundays, sir," said the sergeant-major, drawing comfort from his pipe—a pipe, by the way, of unique appearance and chronic age. "D'you know, sir," he went on reminiscently, "it reminds me of a little incident that 'appened in '02, when we was stationed at——"

He went on for a very long time, like a cinema film.

We were aroused from these peaceful musings by an astonishing message. The message ordered the bridging of the Tigris at Shumran

182 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

at five o'clock the following morning. Whereupon it was generally agreed that in less than twenty-four hours we should "see some fun."

The fun began at the appointed hour. We saw the picked men of the Norfolk Regiment breasting the river bund¹ as the pale dawn came. It was a thrilling sight, like nothing we could have imagined. The bund had been built up high here to prevent inundations from the spring floods. Concealment of the attacking troops was impossible. We saw their grey, tensely-strung figures silhouetted clear against the sky as they climbed over. Then four long oars appeared upright in the first boat, as in some dream of Elizabethan pageantry. Still no sound—not a shot or a bayonet flash from the other side. The boat splashed across in silence, and a second time the oars were held up, and another batch of men crept over the bund and dashed down to the water. Still no sound. And in the meantime hundreds of men whose lives might last but another minute, or be spared them altogether, stole into view and lowered themselves for the Turks to see.

The stillness was uncanny.

¹ Bund—a high bank,

A shell came over and blew up two men by the bridge. Then another and another. There was a hideous metallic ring of exploding bombs, and fifty of our machine-guns, firing from concealed emplacements, opened a splitting barrage over the heads of our men into the approaching enemy. Battery after battery, which we had brought up secretly by night, ran up their observation ladders and opened fire. The earth shook with explosions; the air filled with smoke.

In a few hours the bridge was thrown across and the Turkish Army cut in two. They could do only one thing: fly for their lives. In the midst of their preparations a large British force of infantry, cavalry and artillery passed over the bridge in pursuit.

That evening, the 23rd of February, the enemy made a heavy counter-attack, but it was unavailing—a mere pretence at fighting while the main Turkish force got away.

This smashing of the enemy produced an indescribable enthusiasm, a delightful sense of superiority in everybody. Victory evokes a strange, an infectious, a blind sort of elation. And this was so complete and established a

184 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

victory—the finishing stroke, as it were, to our little war ! (But there we were wrong.) Nevertheless, the agile Turk was now but a wingless beetle feeling the pressure of an Army boot ; and the half-crushed remnant of him limped and twiddled itself to security with scarcely a field dressing to apply to the wound.

The next day we bathed in the Tigris where formerly a swimmer would have met with annihilation. Machine-guns and snipers had vanished ; their furtive movements no longer held us attentive. It was a glorious and unexpected freedom. I recall how we calculated the Wily One's speed in miles per hour, and how hard you would have to swim against a five-knot current to overtake him on his way to Baghdad.

A few days later, as we were following him up-stream, we were abruptly held up at a place called Shaik Jaad. This was annoying, as we had to abandon an excellent entertainment provided by the Navy, whose half-dozen monitors were in the act of distributing their "iron rations." The ease and rapidity with which their guns opened fire, the clockwork agility of it all, was amazing to watch. To be

recalled from such a spectacle for no better reason than to participate in an infantry attack was to descend from the sublime to the ridiculous.

Or so it appeared to me. But then I have often held sane things to be absurd, and temporary madness an excellent thing.

CHAPTER XIX

A MATINÉE PERFORMANCE

THE attack on Shaik Jaad took place at ten minutes past two on a Saturday afternoon. Nobody imagined that anything untoward had happened until the Brigade began to concentrate; and having concentrated, split up into battalions, and again having subdivided went forward in unmistakable attacking formation. Nobody could see anything to attack.

The first plain intimation I received that the Turks were putting up a rearguard action was the sound of vicious twangs at my feet, which I pretended (very unsuccessfully) to ignore. In the distance the dry dust spurted up harmlessly where it was intended some one should have been killed. I could see our artillery getting into action, and on the left several small columns of men moving forward with hurried energy to their objective. Theirs

seemed a different objective from ours. Why were they not co-operating ?

I was given a half-company to take into action. As this was a frontal attack, and already great smudges of smoke were staining the foreground, I began to wish I had given earlier instructions as to the disposal of my private effects. Still, it was no use thinking of that now. "For God's sake *get there !*" I said to myself ; but exactly where was another matter.

The Adjutant shouted orders about extending the men where the Umpteenth Brigade—who were ahead of us—had already extended, and I shouted back that I understood. So the Umpteenth Brigade were in it as well ? Interesting ! Quite an item of news !

At odd intervals along the front small groups of men were still advancing—steadily, and, as it were, insignificantly. It seemed preposterous to attack with such a handful in this unconquerable desert ! The desert swallowed us up.

One or two men were hit, but we were still intact. Suddenly a horrible enfilade fire opened up from the left, and the bullets sang. It was unendurable ; it maddened the men, and they

188 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

quicken the pace. We were now but a few yards from the position, and crossing that short space the air seemed slashed with a thousand knives. My company commander staggered and fell, and as he did so the men headed at a run for the nullah we were to capture. I tried to steady them ; I shouted at them ; I cursed them. It was useless ! Didn't they know that if they were to be hit they were to be hit, and no amount of charging could avert it ? God ! what a distance it seemed ! The last few seconds were appalling. I seemed to be making a stupendous effort—over what ? I was only walking along ! But something was tearing all my nerves away. At length restraint broke bounds and I ran on. A moment after, my company commander was hit a second time, and killed.

When we got into the nullah, which was some six feet in depth, I found several regiments all mixed up together, and our left flank apparently exposed. In this direction, therefore, I began to take a bombing party, when a company from the Umpteenth Brigade suddenly appeared on the scene.

“ Your Regiment is miles away,” they said.

A MATINÉE PERFORMANCE 189

It dawned on me that I must have lost direction.

"Where?"

"On the extreme right. You'd better get along."

It was a Captain who spoke, with a reconnoitring party of at least a hundred behind him.

"You're not going in with bayonets, are you?" I asked him, as he moved down the nullah with his company.

"Of course."

"But you want bombs. There's a machine-gun down there."

"How do you know?"

"I've had it reported."

"Oh—all right." And he hurried along with his hundred men.

A second or two later an unpleasant enfilade spurted down the nullah from the direction of the machine-gun. Nobody was hit, however, although the nullah was packed with men, some sitting, some leaning wearily on their rifles, and yet others busy with Lewis guns. Indeed, the Lewis gunners seemed the only men of any use. In reality there was no room to

190 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

employ all the troops. If they were wanted they were there ; if not they could help the wounded, or take a rest.

I was now in charge of a company, with the obvious task of joining up with the Battalion again. After a great deal of stumbling and zigzagging we reached the other end of the nullah and discovered the Regiment to have been there some time.

On the way I encountered Cardley and Duke. (Duke had recently been attached to us from another Regiment). They were sitting with their backs to the trench wall, silent and in utter dejection. I paused to have a word with them.

“ Ah ! At last ! ” I exclaimed. “ I’ve walked about a hundred miles ! ”

Neither spoke. What could have happened ? I remembered that these two were in B Company, with Burton commanding, and that his men were coming up in support. I had been more anxious about him than about anyone else in the Regiment. At that moment I noticed blood on Duke’s hand. It had an immediate, a ghastly significance.

“ Where’s he got to ? ” I asked.

"He's killed!" Cardley replied.

"He's—*what?*"

"Old B. was shot through the neck," said Duke quietly.

"But he wasn't in it!" I argued, exasperated.

"He was hit by an 'over,'" they explained.

The tragedy of it—the unbelievable tragedy! Burton was a splendid English type of some twenty summers. He had been a rare and sympathetic friend to those who knew him, and as a soldier his place stood high. The gods must have loved him well.

The news left me completely indifferent to the future, however good or however bad it might be. So that, when the C.O. came round and asked whether the company was ready to attack again, I put reinforced energy into the preparations—the strength of despair. He explained that it was only a short distance this time—as far as the next visible nullah. We were to go over with the Umpteenth Brigade at twenty minutes past five. Officers had better synchronize their watches, etc., etc. His words fell on my ears like the automatic chimes of a clock.

The second attack, although easier to press

192 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

home, was certainly more exciting, for we could see the Turks retreating as we advanced, and we worried them with as large a volume of fire as we could muster. They returned this with machine-guns, and on our extreme left there were many casualties ; but there were also many prisoners. Presently the enemy's fire became too hot for us and we were forced to take cover. Providence had provided a valuable hole in the ground at a convenient stopping-place, and as it offered no obstruction to fire we made use of it. Only one man was hit—a bad wound in the chest—and when we pushed on again we had to leave him behind. I found myself next to Captain Clubson, commanding D Company. He was holding his left hand, which clutched a revolver, against his forehead, as if to divert any bullets that came his way, while in the other he carried the inevitable "swagger" cane. He was leading his men well.

"Where's this nullah?" I asked him.

"Can't imagine," he replied. "Haven't the faintest idea."

"Can we have passed it?"

He did not answer, but gave some orders to his men about firing.

A MATINÉE PERFORMANCE 193

"Let 'em have it, you fellers!" he shouted, "they're on the run!"

I passed a Turk who was whining and kicking with pain, and I hoped one of my men had shot him. I hoped the entire Turkish Army was annihilated.

"We'd better get down here," some one shouted across to me. "This must be the spot."

We had reached a wretched little ditch that no amount of camouflage could have disguised as adequate cover. However, it was undoubtedly a nullah and there were no other nullahs for miles. Accordingly we crawled into it and began the usual improvements with entrenching tools.

Dusk was approaching and there was a chilling nip in the air. Great-coats, rations, water and ammunition were all somewhere behind. Well, what did it matter? If there were a counter-attack and we ran out of ammunition we might all be killed. Burton had already been killed.

Stray shots were coming from the rear. Could the Turks be behind us then? If that were the case the Regiment was cut off, and we should

194 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

have to begin fighting, without food or ammunition, all over again. The desert grew dark and the men shivered. All through the night we kept awake, watching and waiting on events.

CHAPTER XX

THE MEN WHO MATTER

NOTHING untoward disturbed the dark hours. Officers went noiselessly on their rounds and men lay awake on listening-post wondering whether Bill or Ted in France were also on listening-post. Futile reflections these—when solid at the back of their minds, like a piece of iron wedged there, was the knowledge that to-morrow, after this vain, staring vigil, the real work would begin. They would get up shiveringly at five, swallow an incomplete breakfast, have an inspection, and be told in a loud voice to move to the right in fours.

In continuous marching, of course, there was nothing that could put us out of countenance. "Foot-sloggers" we had been called, and foot-sloggers we remained. We had been given a tremendous impetus by the victory at Kut, and this carried us all the way to Baghdad.

196 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

To my mind, and probably to the minds of all, Baghdad was the very essence of Eastern romance and plenitude. All the colour and all the riches of the East were there. Incomparable girls danced to incomparable music; the fruitful vine abounded; the bazaars overflowed with produce. No doubt we should awake every morning to the scent of orange-groves and overpowering spices. We should be entertained by courtly Sheikhs in halls as old as Seleucia and in gardens that rivalled Isfahan.

That was the poetry of it. We come now to the reality.

It is one hundred and ten miles from Kut to Baghdad by road. Without opposition we might cover the distance in seven or eight days at the most. But this arithmetic excluded three important factors :

- (1) The weather.
- (2) Difficulties of supply.
- (3) The Turks.

I place the enemy last because he was the least formidable obstacle. He was not an obstacle at all : he was a fugitive. But between ourselves we felt convinced that one

of these contingencies would give operations their quietus and hold us up before we became too successful. Success on such a large scale seemed likely enough as an Arabian Night's Entertainment, but in the everyday drama of campaigning it was not to be thought of.

As to the weather, not a hundred Generals could predict with certainty how the sky would behave. In fact, all former experience argued that bad weather and orders to reach certain objectives generally coincided ; for the period during which fighting was possible (from October to May) was less to be relied upon than a Constantinople watch or a native dealer in Persian carpets. Big risks had to be taken.

This was how we viewed the weather.

Take next the question of supplies. When several Divisions that have been stationary for months leap suddenly from their trenches in a sort of fury of freedom, the Quartermaster-General is given something more than usually brain-racking to think about. A reduction in rations is regarded as inevitable. You expect to be hungry ; hunger, and a decomposing emergency ration, are the reward of this impetuosity.

We left the Quartermaster-General to his

198 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

thoughts and partook daintily of the emergency ration. We nibbled at it as if we were attending some pleasant reception, where it was the polite thing not to satisfy, but merely to stimulate the appetite.

The absence of rations quickly had its effect. We were held up at Aziziyah, where we arrived long in advance of the supply column, and there we had to stay until extra transport or boats brought up more provisions. In the pidgin-English of the private it was clearly a case of "no food, no fight." He would have been delighted to know that on this point Napoleon agreed with him. In the meantime we bought sufficient live stock from the Arabs to prevent famine—and wondered why it was so tough.

Consider, well-fed reader, the full significance of this delay. It was certainly an excellent, God-sent thing to sit down and rest, but it gave that most valuable of all weapons—time—to the enemy. It gave him opportunities to dig in, and no one could dig with greater craft or to better advantage. He might even get reinforcements. There would be another terrific battle at Ctesiphon and for a second time the whole Force would be brought to a stand-

still at the very porch of Baghdad. For want of bully beef !

Thus the question of supplies and the delay it was causing brought alarm that was more mental than physical. And it was real alarm ; for, whereas we were running away from our Base and lengthening our communications, the Turks were running towards theirs and shortening them.

Which brings me to the third factor of obstruction—the Turks themselves. We had not seen any Turks for several days, except dead ones. The air-service, like a well-paid doctor, reported that they were progressing favourably. We had but to follow in attendance.

We followed. The first day was hot and cloudless, and we trudged very slowly across the burning desert to a place called Imam Mahdi. Wreaths of dust rolled thickly from our feet and dried up mouth and throat almost to suffocation. Shortly after midday we halted with every man gasping for water. There were one or two old canals with seemingly good water in them, but it was not running water, and we were forbidden to drink it.

200 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

We hoped to bivouac for the night at Imam Mahdi, and for daring to hope such a thing we naturally went unrewarded. An A.D.C. rode up, speckless and charming, planted the flag of Corps Headquarters where he stood, and intimated politely that the General wished us to proceed another seven miles.

We plodded on till evening, and from that day forth we knew what the routine of a heavy march was to be. It amounted to this: on arrival at Corps Headquarters we could expect a trek of some seven additional miles. At Divisional Headquarters we could congratulate ourselves on a paltry five, and as we marched past the red flag or Brigade we could reduce the distance to a mere mile or two. But those last two miles didn't matter. You realized then that you must have been born to marching and to do nothing else but march.

I had not been with an entire army on the move before; nor, if I can avoid it, will anything induce me to be with one again. I will defy Fate and take a cab. Mile for mile it did not compare unfavourably with any effort that had gone before; but the permanent uncertainty of events and the fear that we might

be brought back to trench warfare gave rise to the acutest anxiety. They made all our possibilities look like impossibilities.

Furthermore, the constant curse and obsession of war : namely, the idea that what you are doing so intently *now* may at some future moment of annihilation be brought to nothing—the courage and the strength and the pain of men instantaneously shattered—this it was that put a check on optimism and snatched the romance from the story.

Set against this was the visible decimation of the enemy, whose wreckage lay strewn along the road to Baghdad. These signs of destruction were a source of exhilaration to everybody, a sort of irresponsible enjoyment—the delight of the puncher in the punched. Every sort of material had been left behind and left recklessly, as it were, in careless anger. And most of it was new and of use.

I remember seeing a dead Turk lying in a crumpled position by the side of an artillery limber. He was apparently killed in the act of serving his gun, for the rows of shells were as yet untouched. His face was blue. We passed hurriedly-left camp-sites littered with

202 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

rubbish and empty tins, and haunted by snarling pariah dogs. We passed dead horses and camels; and all this gave a melancholy novelty to the desert that made you wonder whether the best of deserts was worth fighting for at all.

As each brigade of the Division took its turn to act as advanced guard to the remainder, the chances of "bumping into it" were evenly distributed. Other Divisions were in immediate readiness if a greater "display of force" (note the humour of the term) should be necessary. You could actually see them. Gradually you realized that which hitherto had been unrealizable—the power behind this huge flying column. Not the power of guns, which is brutal and feelingless, but the power of human beings which is passionate and inspiring. To be able to witness thousands of men straining their utmost towards a common object brought a new and wonderful sense of mastery to the individual soldier. The immense achievement as a whole was not in the least his achievement, but he recognized that he belonged and was necessary to it. He recognized that this marching to infinity was having considerable consequences for the world. It illustrated

all the nonsense and all the truth he had ever read or heard concerning the British Army, and that perpetual nuisance, the British Empire.

He found the picture to a minute degree representative of these things. It told him that which is untellable in print, gave him a new sense of the worth of England, a patriotism he had never imagined possible. It urged him to do things and to go on doing them. It was not the madness of 1914; it was the refinement of that madness into something else, into something better, of more use. The mental process that enlightened him was one of those that happen instantaneously on the battlefield, and if the psychology of it is mystifying, that need not provoke us. It was not psychology that won the war.

I vividly remember the picture that gave rise to these unusual emotions. Heavy batteries one saw, with twenty-four horses to each gun, and each team ridden by men with a fire in the eye and the red of health in their faces; and on their lips the insuppressible jest. You should have seen these men whose business of destruction gave them so much to laugh about,

such toughness of muscle and quickness of limb that the dusty uniforms they wore were as fit to place on the shoulders of Apollo. You should have seen them with their long whips and dulled spurs, their arms and throats bared to the wind. Dust and sand could whirl their worst, but still, still they moved forward : on—on and on, unthinkingly heroic.

Behind them, rolling noiselessly over the soft soil, came the guns—black shining incarnations of devilry. Guns of personality from Woolwich and Sheffield. Moving parallel with these were the infantry, the actual conquerors, be it observed, on the field of battle.

When the gunners have finished their work the infantry begin theirs. When the airmen have discovered new trenches the infantry attack them. When the pioneers come up to dig, the infantry move forward to protect them. (More frequently the infantry dig as well.) When the cavalry are “tied up” the infantry are sent out to assist them. When an armoured car gets stuck in the mud a party of infantry is despatched to excavate it. When the General has cold porridge for breakfast he “shoves in the infantry.” When the

situation is critical, the infantry are "shoved in" again. When a tank—but they never had tanks in Mesopotamia.

The infantry, you observe, always obtrude into the picture. On the march to Baghdad they were conspicuously in it, like a futurist daub on the canvas. You saw them streaking to disappearing point in the distance, and, looking the other way, the eye was fogged with a vast and miscellaneous traffic of transport carts, limbers, guns, horses, mules, generals, motor-cars and men—innumerable men—a whole army of men!

Your own company were almost indistinguishable from the dust which enveloped them. Slowly they struggled on, and the sand was blown into brown spinning clouds—high, hilarious and horrible. It coloured their faces brown till they looked inhuman; it clogged their eyes and ears; it dried up their throats and held them speechless. Water, had it been procurable, was useless against this sky full of dust.

You could promise the men no rest; you could promise them nothing. At all costs they must keep on, and, at their peril, fall out.

206 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

They must keep on—because they were told to keep on.

The tenacity of these infantrymen was a thing to marvel at—a wonderfully British thing. Occasionally, it is true, they hardly marched at all, but moved with a half-conscious, half-senseless persistence. And no word was spoken. March with a hundred silent men, O reader, for ten miles across an empty desert, and know what an ordeal it is.

And what remained for the men when the long day drew to a close? There was one thing—that which they needed most—the incalculable gift of sleep. But if the transport came in late, as it had a habit of doing, neither fires could be lit nor meals cooked; neither blankets could be issued nor sleep obtained; which was tantamount to the world collapsing. These were the days we damned.

But when the long procession came to a halt early and the second-line transport creaked and clattered into camp unimpeded, it was like a battle won to be tired and hungry. You caught the comforting tap-tap of animals being picketed; you saw the smoke and blaze of a dozen fires. All the preparations for settling

down became merged into the low confident sound of men conversing, or rose into strangely thrilling snatches of English song.

For it was in this way that the history and the pageantry, and the intense life of a single day were fulfilled, with the nightly consolation that there were still a few hours left to dream of whomsoever you pleased.

CHAPTER XXI

SHOVELS

WE were at Bawi—only eight miles from Baghdad. Here there was some delay, and to break the monotony of another mysterious halt I decided to pay a visit to a friend of mine at Divisional Headquarters. Even to have some one as an acquaintance there was a distinction.

After a zigzag route past piled rifles, wireless stations, cook-houses, bivouacs and transport of all kinds I came within sight of the Divisional tents. The Great Man of Headquarters was standing outside when I arrived, and the sight of his golden cap and vigorous, if anxious, features made me acutely aware of the subaltern's insignificance. However, here was Headquarters, and here was Captain Fane-Wilson, whom I was bent on seeing.

I was "received" with cordiality, but it was a worthless cordiality—the kind you are given by the dentist. Nothing is more disarming

on such occasions than the politeness of great soldiers.

"Have you had lunch?" the Staff-Captain asked.

"Yes, thanks," I replied, and instantly wished I had said "No." The Divisional Mess bills were something fabulous.

"Oh, well, have a drink."

Magnificent reception! I consumed the Divisional whisky!

Recovering from this dizzy reception I sat down among the red-tabbed host, and attempted conversation. The simplicity of the place, even on an active service footing, was astonishing. I had not expected a mansion, but neither had I expected the comfortless minimum of an infantry battalion. Except for a table and two forms, and crockery that went all the way round, I could see no difference.

I was extremely anxious to learn something from a Staff point of view, or at all events from a point of view other than that granted the infantry. The infantry make guesses and go on; the Staff know for certain (or say they do) and stay where they are. To ask for information, therefore, was out of the question. I would

be met with evasions or a change of subject. Yet even these would be better than complete silence. My line must be disinterested, tactful, unknowing.

"We seem to be held up here?" I said tentatively.

"Oh! Why?"

Didn't he know we were held up, or should I tell him?

"The Diyalah will be an awkward river to tackle," I added, convinced that the Turks would not be found snoring at their posts a second time.

"I don't think so," Fane-Wilson said with placid assurance, as though his not thinking so made success in the future a certainty.

The retort of a braver and less gentlemanly officer to this remark would have been: "No, sir, but you're not doing the job." My actual retort began:

"There's a nasty position——"

"But we can cross further up, surely?" my friend interrupted; and I was aghast at his optimism.

"Where?" I asked. "The Diyalah goes like this, doesn't it?"

I drew a picture on the Mess table with my finger. It was an unpleasant-looking river.

"I expect we can get round them here," the Staff man suggested, indicating a point far away up-stream.

"H'm, I suppose we can," I concluded.

To conclude was the only thing to do! I supposed we could! In reality I supposed no such thing. I knew in fact that we were about to attempt a crossing in the teeth of the strongest opposition. Useless, therefore, to go on in this strain. There is such a thing as knowing too much, and on these grounds I thought it best to remain ignorant. I felt certain Fane-Wilson had all the facts in his possession, but owing to Staff etiquette or in the interests of discipline, or something equally obnoxious, he proposed not to divulge them.

We were conversationally bankrupt, when a Major hurriedly entered with the important question :

"How many shovels do the Brigade want, Wilson?"

"A hundred and forty," was the reply. "At least—let me see——"

212 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

In the middle of these calculations I took my leave.

A hundred and forty shovels ! There was one certainty at all events—a certainty of more digging !

The day afterwards my company left Bawi for the peaceful business of escort to a battery of sixty-pounders. Coming in the middle of the war this was a change. It gave us a comparative rest : it was a diversion from the hard tedium of infantry work.

During this time, after three costly attempts, the Diyalah was bridged and troops pushed a mile or two nearer the Promised City. We effected the operation in the manner and at the place foreseen, going over immediately opposite the Turks' prepared position, and not "farther up" at all. Reconnaissances were made with that end in view, but nothing came of them. We advanced where the enemy were thickest. In the first two attempts—both terrible failures—men were rowed across as before in small boats, with the object of securing the farther river-bank. But the Turks opened a heavy fire on us and bombed the boats from houses and shelters on their side. The light

craft were instantly riddled, and most of those who were not killed by bombs fell into the water wounded.

If you can imagine the risk and horror of this episode you will know what real gallantry is. But from an easy-chair rather than the desert at midnight I doubt whether anyone can. It is bad enough to be hit by shrapnel or a bullet, but it is ten times more shocking to know that in such an event you will probably be flung into a swiftly-flowing river. It reads like a tale of Edgar Allan Poe, with all the calculated elements of terror and danger made actual.

Some hundreds of men died and some hundreds more were wounded in this affair, and doubts were expressed whether the crossing could not have been undertaken at less cost and with better organized artillery preparation. It was not until the third attempt was made that our guns opened in full blast. Only then were the enemy pounded till they could hold on no longer. They were brave men, these Turks, and as long as they were defending they gave us some anxious moments.

After a magnificent stand by some sixty British troops who had crossed the river and

214 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

could neither withdraw nor advance, reinforcements were able to reach them and the "Diyalah show" was over.

The outstanding feature of this struggle was the exploit of a Lancashire private. With superb nerve he swam the river under a full moon, carrying a telephone wire with him to his friends over the way, and giving them a means of communication with their unit. He got across although exposed to every kind of fire, and he was given a V.C. for it. Cold-blooded valour of this kind, methinks, is exceptionally cheap at eighteenpence a day. But possibly the War Office disagree with me.

CHAPTER XXII

THE NEW NOTEPAPER

WE took it for granted that at a distance of only five miles from Baghdad the city was as good as taken. But we were in error. The Division moved slowly across the bridge of boats past stacks of captured rifles and along a road deeply puckered and flung-up with "crump" holes. The state of the road only emphasized the tremendous smashing dealt the enemy. Once more you were compelled to admire his courage, his gallant habit of putting up a fight even when all was lost.

Presently the Division halted. We moved on a short distance and halted again, until the march resolved itself into a succession of advances and checks. If the road lay clear to Baghdad there could be no object in stopping. You cleverly drew the conclusion that the road to Baghdad was not clear. Somewhere near the horizon,

216 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

in fact, like animated cattle on a distant pasture, several cavalry patrols were moving about in an ineffectual way, and a few riderless horses, vainly nibbling the desert, suddenly started and galloped off in terror. Above them a cloud of small white puffs in the air indicated shrapnel. An Indian cavalry officer came tearing towards us at an immense speed, as if he had seen Baghdad and were immediately anxious to tell some one.

Doubtless his information was that the trenches at Tel Mahummed were occupied, for in another moment the C.O. was telling us in a grim, dispassionately warlike tone that we were to go up at once in support of the Brumshires. The Brumshires, he said, were making a holding attack while the Z Brigade were taking the enemy on the flank. He said other things.

After this illuminating lecture we "went into it." You must think of a long line of palms to the left, bordering and hiding the Tigris. On the right a great waste of sand. Frontally the same great waste of sand, with a long low uninspiring mound—Tel Mahummed—rising out of it. Behind all this, as inaccessible alike

to mind as to eye, lay the city of Baghdad. It would be a pity to get killed without seeing it, I thought.

The Turks that Saturday afternoon were particularly brilliant with their high explosive. For several minutes that were intolerably nerve-racking they landed their shells neatly and closely to right and left of us. I could see the company second in command taking up his two platoons steadily enough, but with a look of such concentrated worry in his face that it is a wonder he ever got over it. I shouted to him to keep straight, as he was losing direction, and I glanced at my own men expecting to see them disintegrated—smashed up! No! they were coming along merrily, but the continued “zump-wang-ng-ng” of closely-falling shells was getting on their nerves. It was as if you had been fiercely struck without feeling the blow, as if your senses had gone but your body remained—a feeling of internal tumult and intense apprehension and efforts at steadiness all confusedly mingled together. You wondered how you would look after this, if there were an after, and incidentally you aimed terrific oaths at the eighteen-pounders for going

218 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

ahead of the infantry and making a target for you to pass through. If the Turks shot at our gunners they were pretty certain—zump-wang-ng-ng-ng !—to hit the infantry.

However, we came through without a single casualty from shell-fire, and halted to dig in. The rifle-fire slackened and died away as we advanced, and yet again we were ordered to dig in.

That night was an appalling one. The wind rose high, and flung the dust into our eyes. Three times we took up positions and three times abandoned them, digging, presumably, with the Brigade's additional hundred and forty shovels.

It was pitch dark. Patrols lost themselves ; a few men disappeared. Even the date-palms were invisible. At two in the morning I was ordered to go up and occupy the trenches which it was reported the enemy had evacuated. I bore steadily to the left, thinking it better to walk into the river than into the open plain, and in two hours reached Tel Mahummed. The trenches were narrow and deep and extraordinarily well cut. I sent out reconnoitring patrols, and was in hopes of the men getting a

little sleep, when the first faint streak of dawn appeared and we had to "stand to."

We stood to. A great flare of coppery red was hovering across the sky, and we knew the Turks had set their city aflame. It was thrilling and yet saddening to see this fearful blaze, as of some treasure being deliberately destroyed—ruthlessly, viciously, madly.

But to-morrow the old city would belong to us! What an event it would be to head our notepaper:

"BAGHDAD,
March 11th, 1917!"

CHAPTER XXIII

AFTER SIX O'CLOCK

I HAD four very good reasons for wishing to see Baghdad. First, we had fought for Baghdad ; secondly, we had captured Baghdad ; thirdly, Baghdad was undoubtedly an interesting place to see ; and, fourthly, there were millions of people who had never seen Baghdad. There was something undeniably attractive in entering a place which half the people in the world would give much to visit without their ever being able to do so. It lent dignity to the somewhat boring task of conquering cities.

From Kut to Baghdad is a long way, especially if you have to walk it. We all knew it was a long way before we started ; we were more than ever convinced of it by the time the pursuit was over. At a point but eight miles distant we were rewarded by a glimpse of the place we had been fighting for. It scarcely seemed

credible, but through our glasses we could just discern a dim city of domes and spires lying low amid the date-palms. Was it Baghdad or was it not? Nobody could say for certain. The picturesque scene disclosed by the binoculars seemed so very hazy and far away and improbable that it might not be Baghdad at all. It might be a mere figment of the imagination. We had been talking and thinking of Baghdad for so long now.

Fortunately our eyes had not deceived us; for a day or two later we actually beheld the mosques and minarets of the city rising brilliantly from the mud-coloured rows of houses. We were unquestionably there. To our profound satisfaction and relief Baghdad lay behind us, reflecting itself quiveringly in a wonderful mirage. No longer need we run our fingers over official maps in a hopeful calculation of impending attacks or the probable number of miles to the next halting place. We imagined this *was* the last halting-place, and that comfortable billets would be allotted us almost immediately. We could have been better employed in hoping for other things, since not a single soldier in the Brigade knew what

222 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

it was to have a roof over him for long afterwards.

The Regiment to which I was attached did not actually enter Baghdad until two days after its capitulation, when the occasion was no search for "apartments," but the summary ejection from the city of such undesirables as were attempting to evade capture. We were told Baghdad had been looted from end to end—first by the Turks before they fled, and subsequently by parties of hostile Arabs. Hence our dreams of cigarettes without end and inexhaustible supplies of mess stores faded in the light of this information, and we resigned ourselves to the little that was better than none.

The way to the city lay through an avenue of date-palms and orange-groves. Personally, I begrudged a march of some three hundred and fifty miles if there were nothing better worth seeing than these. I had seen palm-trees before and done my best to rejoice over them (or under them), but I found that enthusiasm for this sort of thing belonged rather to the visitor at picture-galleries than to the helpless dweller in the desert. In this and in other connections, it was noteworthy what an entire

disregard for our personal feelings the Higher Command displayed ever since we originally set foot in Mesopotamia ! As if *they* cared about the æsthetic tastes of officers, so long as the inscrutable will of the War Office were translated into action ! Moreover, there were no oranges on the orange-trees and no dates on the date-palms. Our impatience over these deficiencies was not to last long, however. A mile or two of such scenery brought us to the city itself.

Before us stretched a big town—a town of substantial mud and brick buildings, chokingly hot and dusty in aspect. When we entered the main street it was found to be partially in ruins. Doubtless this was the achievement of the Turk prior to his hurried departure northwards. Fences were torn down, walls cracked and fallen ; a confusion of bricks and building material piled high where it had collapsed represented all that was left of some of the better-class houses.

As for the bāzaars, they were cleared of nearly everything of any value, and were temporarily closed in consequence. A few miserable shops remained open with a poor

224 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

assortment of miscellaneous wares. Sugar seemed to have survived in good quantity, made up in those hard conical-shaped lumps common to these parts. I have tried that sugar before, and unless you are prepared for half an hour's manual labour, with a hammer and chisel, do not be tempted to buy it. You cannot put a pound of sugar in a pint of tea. Matches were also abundant, but cigarettes, save for the long unpalatable Arab variety, were not to be had anywhere.

Here and there minarets showed their sharp points against the sky, and some magnificent mosques lent dignity and colour to the somewhat drab architecture of the place. These sacred monuments were very beautiful, viewed either from a distance or close at hand, and their domes were bright with arabesques in gold, red and green; while around the bases was further ornament in the shape of Arabic inscriptions. This decoration was invariably done on a background of blue enamelled tiles, though the partiality shown for blue, unless it is symbolic of heaven, is not easy to explain. With the exception of a magnificent gold-topped temple situated a few miles outside

Baghdad,¹ the builders of mosques seemed to favour this colour above all the hues at their command.

As for the population, they could only be described as a "mixed crowd." They flooded the streets in scores of thousands² when we arrived, swarming on the pavement, sitting in groups at the cross-roads, lounging lazily at their front doors, or filling the dark, unwholesome cafés. These people and their houses were as Eastern as anyone could wish who has read the Arabian Nights or imagined himself a rich merchant dangling a bunch of keys. Do not laugh at the bunch of keys. It plays an important part in the lives of the Baghdad populace. It is their rock and defence. Seek permission to enter their homes, and, after a little fuss, the household latch-key is produced. It is a huge thing that might have done service since the Stone—or should one say the Mud?—Age. Turn it ten thousand times and it will never wear out. Drop it, jump on it, hammer in your tent-pegs with it—it breaketh not.

¹ At Kazimain.

² Before the war the inhabitants of Baghdad city numbered about 200,000; in ancient times over 1,000,000.

The owner of the house fumbles the great key in the lock, turns it at least six or seven times, and pushes open the heavy wooden door for you to enter. The courtyard is crowded with men, women and children. The men gaze at you inscrutably ; the women show either an abnormal interest in your movements or disregard you altogether. Only the children are really appreciative, and eye you with the frank curiosity they would bestow on some new toy.

In the present instance an Armenian lady was head of the house. She spoke French, ignored her husband, and said how glad she was to see us. *Son mari*, appearing from some remote corner, deferentially offered me a cigarette, which I accepted with the hauteur of a Prussian General. We English had not fought for nothing, i' faith ! On asking for a match, half-a-dozen hands searched frantically for the article and as frantically insisted on striking it for me.

As we left the house, they were all smiles and thanks and invitations to us to come again. I explained with elaborate politeness, and in fourth-form French, the impossibility of a

second visit owing to the great war. This they appeared to understand, and we gratefully made our escape.

Truth to tell we were very glad to get away. The Armenians of Baghdad are a very affable people, but their habits of simultaneous speech are embarrassing. The ensuing noise is not tolerable for more than five minutes. In explaining a comparatively unimportant point they employ the language and gestures of desperation. It is good policy never to misunderstand them, whatever the tongue they may happen to be speaking. As a rule, one of them acts as spokesman to the remainder, perhaps a dozen in number. Once hint to him that you did not quite catch that last word, that you are inclined to disagree with him regarding the truth of that last statement, and a tremendous hubbub of voices arises to check further intercourse. Their frenzied exclamations are indescribable; they are comparable with no cry of bird or beast ever heard at a zoological gardens. In the face of such an uproar there was only one thing we could do: tender our "salaams" and fly.

We flew. We flew out into the street and into

228 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

the arms (or very nearly) of some Chaldean priests. Fortunately they spoke French and were very amiably disposed towards us. They were tall, impressive-looking men, a trifle ascetic in countenance, but genial enough in conversation. For dress they wore black flowing gowns, and quaint round hats of a black material resembling glazed cardboard. The Chaldeans are a Roman Catholic sect and have their own church in Baghdad, which they offered to show us.

We went first of all into their house, a much better place in all respects than the church it adjoined. Here we had Turkish coffee, while they recounted the now ancient history of the destruction of Baghdad. I was rather diffident about the coffee, recollecting some *café noir inférieur* which I had tasted in less auspicious days. This, however, was quite evidently their *café noir de luxe*, and very excellent it was. It was served in tiny china cups, such as Alice in Wonderland probably used at the mad tea-party. Your fingers felt ridiculously clumsy, not to say uneasy, around this delicate china, after the thick, bullet-proof mugs to which we had been accustomed.

There was nothing worthy of note in the church itself. It was in bad repair and empty of decoration except for a few tawdry ornaments—some in plaster, some in cheap highly-coloured metal. Upstairs there was a school for three hundred children. There was also a harmonium. As if to demonstrate his loyalty beyond question, one of the priests sat down and played the English National Anthem to us. Afterwards he told us the church was twenty years old. He said nothing about the harmonium, however.

It was time now to return to camp. The air, at all times relaxing, was becoming cooler, and profoundly glad we were to feel it. During the day, little eddying columns of dust had scurried with exasperating frequency from end to end of the street, partially suffocating us, and instantly destroying any mistaken idea of charm we might have associated with the city. It was a detestable City. Its proper concomitants were dust and worms, and such human and other wreckage as had recently met our gaze.

Soon, however, we were getting away from the hot, oppressive atmosphere of houses, from the pariah dogs sniffing round the rubbish

heaps or lying inert in the middle of the road. We were getting out of sight of the ragged little Armenian boys with their dusty dates, dusty faces, and dusty feet. Arabs no longer marked us from dark corners, or stared at us through the blue smoke from their hookahs. Nor did wrinkled women, semi-veiled, drone out the price of cigarettes and matches as they trudged unenterprisingly along the highway.

Now we were among the palms and orange-groves again—and it was evening. The East always becomes more Eastern after six o'clock. Its strangeness and its potency can be felt at that hour. The streets are quieter; the river asleep; there is a new magic in the shadows. The pointed leaves of the date-palms strike inkily-black against a sky of faintest blue—an unfailing reminder that, despite its Oriental splendour and multi-coloured magnificence, Baghdad is a very long way from home. These palm-trees, these gorgeous mosques and minarets, these bewilderingly beautiful shades tinging the sky at nightfall, for all the fine picture they make, only heighten the contrast between East and West. And we could not but remember that we were of the West.

We turned wearily from the road and struck the desert.

Those lights in the distance were the lights of our camp. At that moment the cooks were boiling the chicken we had bought from a neighbouring Arab village. And chicken was an event. Not only that, but as far as we knew we were not having a battle the next day, nor were we marching for the "nth" time to a place with an unpronounceable name. Baghdad was behind us, and the Turks—a considerable distance away—were still suffering from severe nerve-shock.

We ordered the chicken and ate our fill.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LAST THRILL

AS much in deference to the reader's feelings as to my own, the scheme of this narrative carries us no further than the capture of Baghdad. Heroic battles took place shortly afterwards at Samarra, Deltawa and Marl Plain, but they form no part of my own experience, and it would be presumption for me to attempt their history. Moreover, the victory at Baghdad was undoubtedly the culminating point of the whole campaign. We can leave the story here without regret, and say to ourselves : " Well, thank Heaven there can be but one Baghdad to each war ! "

The operations which followed, while of the utmost importance for the city's defence, were not less in the nature of an anti-climax. In this advance I got no further than Kaserin—

a small, peaceful, palmy place twenty-eight miles up-stream of Baghdad. Here I was fortunate enough to succumb to an attack of malaria. Thankful for this convenient disease—for it sent me to India—I yet felt that I ought still to be with my battalion. I felt I had no right to be ill. Where was my “offensive spirit” now?

Of the Petershires (and, indeed, of nearly every battalion) calamitous stories were being told in all the hospitals. But by then I was too contemptuous of everything, too intolerant of everybody, to pay the smallest attention to frenzies from the firing-line. Rumour would have died an instant death had it depended on me for a livelihood.

We were still enduring terrific Mesopotamian heat, and in an interim when I was supposed to be completing convalescence, I would spend my days buying damp chocolate at the bazaar, or winding up the gramophone at the Amara Club. Of the club, or a similar club, I have already told; and of any other subject connected with the Tigris there is little further to tell. During this exciting recuperative period the heat in your tent acted as a kind of sleeping

234 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

draught, and you dozed as a man overcome with opium, but without his sublime sensations. Indeed, you were almost bereft of sensation, nor could you conceive of any but that of one day becoming cool again.

After some months in India—and by then almost automatically—I was sent back to the Gulf. Then, in high adventure and complete mystery to the Caucasus; whence, by an incredible accident on the part of the War Office, I was sent home. This was the most thrilling experience that ever befell me, and these pages cannot be ended without some reference to its results.

After three years and four months in the East, a prospect unfolded itself tremendous in its possibilities. Three years and four months is 172 weeks, or 1204 days. In moments of melancholy I used to console myself with this deep arithmetic, remarking that the bit I was doing was becoming a positive lump. Vanity of this sort may be a failing, but it never lasts very long in the Army.

Finding it a profitless and depressing occupation, my battalion had almost given up thinking of England; or, if ever they did, they thought of

it as of something very precious that had been lost, and was now but a memory. For those of us at home with any imagination whatsoever, the field of war was the only thing that mattered—that thunderous, unnamable, godless place where killing and cursing and anguish indescribable were a daily progress. For those who were at the War, home was the only thing that mattered ; but in each case it was the forbidden thing, the demoralizing thing, the whispered thing. It was an intolerable secret.

Transfer yourself for a moment, then, from an atmosphere of blood and horror to one of quietude and glowing creation, and you may gain some idea of what this swift rebirth of a dead desire meant—the desire for English faces and English fields. And, when you have done that, you will naturally want to secure your world from war for ever. Of course ! You are perhaps the ten-millionth person to utter determinedly : “ Never again ! This is the War that has ended war.” And so forth.

Alas ! We have all said this with intense seriousness and strength of purpose and passionate hope, vowing that what can be said can

also be done. It would be easy indeed to moralize on the peaceable course which the future must be made to take, were it not for the fact that competent thinkers and statesmen have drummed this ideal into the ears of a listless public for generation upon generation—ineffectively. Others have drummed it out. Were it not also for this other and more obstinate fact: that there are some things in the world which will never be put down altogether; or which, if the effort to do so is successful, will only be counteracted by some other thing coming up. Destroy a city or murder a stock-broker, and always there is room for another in the same place. You see how difficult it is to prevent the world turning round!

In this new day of ours, however, life is perhaps too strong, too full-blooded and impatient of itself, to slacken nervelessly into pessimism. But, for all that, thoughts of the past—especially ugly thoughts—have a habit of springing up unbidden, like weeds in the mind's soil. So that, however tenaciously we strive to forget the war, we cannot wholly forget it. It is impossible to forget it. Only the dead have found that high oblivion. Nevertheless,

if the memory remains, the substance that made it has dissolved. That is the real and immediate freedom—the release from a world of trivial tyrannies and injustices year upon year endured ; endured implicitly ; by command.

For myself, I have no desire to recall that once upon a time I was forbidden to raise my hat or to stand up as I was made to stand. I do not wish to be reminded that I was under compulsion to swallow special food or special religion ; nor that if I wanted to go to Brighton I must stay at Aldershot ; or that my absence from the dinner-table must be humbly petitioned for ; or that I was penalized from wearing a yellow tie or purple socks ; and that if I grew a moustache it must be grown to specification. I have no wish to remember that I had to see somebody else's doctor when I was ill. I have no wish to remember the same doctor telling me I was ill when I was not ill. I recoil from the fact that I was not allowed to write letters home, but only pages of emptiness ; and that to certain majestic persons I had to lift my right hand with clockwork exactitude forty times a day. I hate to think that I had to get up at five in the morning when I wished to rise

238 THE BAGGING OF BAGHDAD

at eight, and to lie down at eight in the evening if I were tired at five. And at last it flashes upon me that I need no longer think of these things. Suddenly the universe is transformed, re-illuminated, so that the dawn becomes full of wonder and the twilight pure gold.

THE END

THE ROAD TO EN-DOR

By E. H. JONES, Lt., I.A.R.O.

With Illustrations by C. W. HILL, Lt., R.A.F.

Fifth Edition, 8s. 6d. net.

This book, besides telling an extraordinary story, will appeal to everyone who is interested in Spiritualism. The book reads like a wild romance, but it is authenticated in every detail by fellow-officers and official documents.

Morning Post.—"It is easily the most surprising story of the escape of prisoners of war which has yet appeared. . . . No more effective exposure of the methods of the medium has ever been written. . . . This book is indeed an invaluable reduction to absurdity of claims of the spiritualist coteries."

Times.—"Astounding of great value."

Daily Graphic.—"The most amazing story of the war."

Dundee Advertiser.—"The most amazing hoax of the war."

Daily Telegraph.—"This is one of the most realistic, grimdest, and at the same time most entertaining, books ever given to the public. . . . *The Road to En-Dor* is a book with a thrill on every page, is full of genuine adventure. . . . Everybody should read it."

Birmingham Post.—"The story of surely the most colossal 'fake' of modern times."

Evening News.—"The tale of the two lieutenants is perhaps the noblest example of the game and fine art of spoof that the world has ever seen, or ever will see . . . their wonderful and almost monstrous elaboration . . . an amazing story."

Glasgow Evening News.—"An absolutely fresh, unexpected, and inimitable true story of what we fancy is the greatest spoof of the Great War."

Everyman.—"One of the most amazing tales that we have ever read. The gradual augmentation of the spook's power is one of the most preposterous, the most laughable histories in the whole literature of spoofing. Lieut. Jones has given us a wonderful book—even a great book."

JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD, VIGO ST., W. 1.

THE ROAD TO EN-DOR

By E. H. JONES, Lt., I.A.R.O.

With Illustrations by C. W. HILL, Lt., R.A.F.

Fifth Edition. 8s. 6d. net.

Spectator.—"The reader who begins this book after dinner will probably be found at one o'clock in the morning still reading, with eyes goggling and mouth open, beside his cold grate."

Punch.—"It is the most extraordinary war-tale which has come my way. The author is a sound craftsman with a considerable sense of style and construction. His record of adventures is really astounding."

Country Life.—"More exciting than any novel. . . . The book is a record of almost incredible courage and inventiveness."

Bystander.—"It is one of the most unexpected and engaging books for which the War has been responsible."

Pall Mall Gazette.—"A really entertaining account of a wonderfully successful and useful rag on an unusually big scale."

Westminster Gazette.—"Lieuts. Jones and Hill displayed an inventiveness, an ingenuity, and a patience worthy of the greatest admiration."

Outlook.—"The book deserves to become a classic."

Illustrated London News.—"It is an amazing story, humorously told, of a subtle and successful conspiracy to escape. But it is also a most telling indictment of the spiritualistic craze."

New Age.—"As a mere story of adventure and suffering the book is one of the most remarkable known to me; it is an epic of human ingenuity and human endurance."

Queen.—"Sensational and amazing . . . absorbingly interesting."

Daily Mail.—"A really striking and diverting story."

JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD, VIGO ST., W. 1.

W. J. LOCKE'S NEW NOVEL

THE

HOUSE OF BALTAZAR

Second Large Edition, 7s. net.

Daily Telegraph.—"An entertaining story, very ingeniously contrived. . . . In John Baltazar there is real and original character-drawing. His abrupt changes of front, his glowing energy, his eager, impetuous heart, and his superb capacity for work make him a truly lovable figure."

Morning Post.—"The light touch is perhaps the most fortunate asset of a novelist, and Mr. Locke has it pre-eminent. It enables him to fashion a story which we read with pleasure. . . . Mr. Locke as a story-teller is both happy and lucky."

Pall Mall Gazette.—"Mr. Locke scores with 'The House of Baltazar' by giving us the full piquancy of the improbable and yet holding us deeply engrossed in the personalities of those who are involved in it. . . . Handled with fine discrimination."

Truth.—"The House of Baltazar' has all the old charms which has won for Mr. Locke such popularity. It may be assured of the warmest of welcomes."

Tatler.—"Very Locke-ish. There is a charm about the story which is very endearing."

Liverpool Courier.—"The House of Baltazar' is a fine novel. . . . John Baltazar will pass into the glorious company of Marcus and Simon and Septimus and Paragot. We are glad, for Mr. Locke's picturesque heroes are among the few precious things left in modern English fiction."

Yorkshire Post.—"Most original in both its plot and its characters. John Baltazar is a very human personality . . . intensely lovable . . . a very delightful story."

Scotsman.—"The reader will retain the most enjoyable recollections."

JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD, VIGO ST., W.1.

